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The Circle of Life: Narrative, performativity and ageing in Peter Cheeseman's
documentary dramas *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls*

Ruth Elizabeth Basten

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Abstract

The relationship between ageing and theatre has received relatively little scholarly attention. This thesis focuses precisely on this intersection by investigating the relationship between theatre and the ageing process drawing on critical gerontology and literary theory. The research explores the documentary dramas of Peter Cheeseman by looking in detail at two of the documentaries, *Fight for Shelton Bar!* (1972) and *Nice Girls* (1993). The thesis uses a complex bricolage style of analysis to explore what narratives of the life-course reveal about ageing and intergenerational relations in *Nice Girls* and *Fight for Shelton Bar!*; as well as discovering what impacts being involved with the Vic/New Vic documentaries have on individuals' lives and their engagement with their community. The research uses different types of narrative: narratives taken from a study of the documentaries themselves; narratives as seen through the archive, which include alternative stories and discourses to those which shaped the finished documentaries; and contemporary narratives gathered from performers and original participants from both documentaries.

The thesis situates Cheeseman's documentaries in the context of twentieth-century theatre history. In addition, it innovates methodologically by presenting the contemporary narratives in the form of dramatic scripts, with analytical commentaries. The source analyses are taken from an in-depth exploration of the Victoria theatre archive. The thesis argues that this archival material is a complex affective record of the community's past feelings about ageing as part of the life-course.

It is through this layering of analysis that the thesis draws together thematic threads relating to community, family, intergenerational relationships, representation, shifting forms of

engagement and ageing, looked at from a life-course perspective. The thesis argues that the Vic/New Vic theatre is a space that licences affective engagement. Consequently, attitudes to ageing emerge through the documentaries even though that was not the pre-determined focus of Cheeseman's work.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Contents Page	iii
List of Figures	ix
Acknowledgments	x
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1 The Research	1
1.2 Making Connections Personal	6
1.3 Coming Full Circle – an autoethnographic play	8
1.4 Reflections on Scene One	12
1.5 Scene Two	13
1.6 Reflections on Scene Two	17
1.7 Scene Three	18
1.8 Reflections on Scene Three	21
1.9 Research Bricolage	21
1.10 Literary Analysis	23
1.11 Thesis Structure	26
Chapter Two: Context and Intersections	28
2.1 The Vic Documentary Drama in Context	29

2.2 Actuality	41
2.3 Theatre-in-the-round	44
2.4 The History of the Vic	48
2.5 Verbatim Theatre – Cheeseman’s legacy	50
2.6 Community, Ageing and the Life-Course	56
2.6.1 Understandings of Community	58
2.6.2 Age, Ageing Identity and the Life-course	62
2.6.3 Representations of Ageing at the Vic and in the Theatre	65
2.6.4 Representations of Age	68
2.6.5 Gendered Ageing	72
2.6.6 Retirement	76
2.7 Conclusion	78
 Chapter Three: Behind the Scenes	 80
3.1 Stories Taking Centre Stage	81
3.2 Methodological Links to Critical Gerontology	83
3.3 Narrative Inquiry	86
3.4 Narratives from Archives	89
3.5 Narratives from Interviews	91
3.6 Insider/Outsider Researcher	93
3.7 Performative Social Science	95
3.8 Conclusion	98

Chapter Four: The Making of the Thesis	100
4.1 Ethics	101
4.2 <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i> Research	103
4.3 Conducting Interviews	106
4.4 Interviews: <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	107
4.5 Using the Vic Archive: <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	112
4.6 <i>Nice Girls</i> Research	115
4.7 Interviews: <i>Nice Girls</i>	117
4.8 Using the Vic Archive: <i>Nice Girls</i>	118
4.9 Narrative Analysis	121
4.10 Conclusion	123
 Chapter Five: <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>: Family and Community	 124
5.1 Setting the scene	124
5.2 Performing in the Circle:	127
Rounding up the Ladies for the Company	
5.2.1 Scene One: Beginnings at the Vic	129
5.2.2 Scene Two: The Documentaries	140
5.3 Analysis of narrative	162
5.3.1 Beginnings at the Vic	163

5.3.2 Community	165
5.3.3 Life-course	168
5.3.4 Achievements of <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	170
5.3.5 Reflections on process	171
5.4 Narratives from the archive	174
5.5 Source analysis: <i>Mill Meeting 1</i>	175
5.5.1 Shifting the Actuality	181
5.5.2 Disagreement within the works	182
5.5.3 Personal implications and intergenerational/age related issues.	183
5.6 <i>Working round here: Stories from two of the original participants of Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	185
5.7 Analysis of Narrative	218
5.7.1 Reflections on Process	224
5.8 Source analysis: The Process	230
5.9 <i>The Retirement- Closing the Circle</i>	242
5.10 Analysis of Narrative	264
5.10.1 Retirement and life-course	265
5.10.2 Family and Intergenerational relationships	270
5.10.3 Understandings and Representations of age	271
5.10.4 Understandings of Community	274
5.10.5 Reflections on process	276

5.11 Conclusion	277
Chapter Six: <i>Nice Girls</i>: Representations and Transitions	279
6.1 Setting the scene	279
6.2 <i>Nice Girls Round the Corner</i> : Preface	287
6.3 <i>Nice Girls Round the Corner: The Beginning</i>	291
6.4 Analysis of narrative	305
6.4.1 Reflections on process	310
6.5 <i>Nice Girls Round the Corner: The Middle</i>	312
6.6 Analysis of Narrative	335
6.6.1 Community and belonging	336
6.6.2 The Vic as an intimate space	338
6.6.3 Representation	339
6.6.4 Ethical implications	342
6.7 <i>Nice Girls Round the Corner: The End</i>	344
6.8 Analysis of Narrative	366
6.8.1 Conclusion	374
6.9 <i>Nice Girls</i> Source Analyses	375
6.9.1 The Wilkinson Scene	377
6.9.2 The Transcripts	379
6.9.3 Final Speeches	388
6.9.4 Biographical Narratives	391
6.10 Conclusion	401

Chapter Seven: Modest connections	403
7.1 Limitations of the study	408
7.2 Originality	411
7.3 Contribution to knowledge	411
7.4 Possible future research	413
 References	 415
Appendices	445
Appendix 1.1: Explanation of stage directions	446
Appendix 2.1: Policy Statement	447
Appendix 4.0: Information Leaflet	448
Appendix 4.1: Ethical approval	452
Appendix 4.2: Consent forms	453
Appendix 4.3: Map of archive	455
Appendix 5.1: Mill meeting scene	456
Appendix 5.2: Kaldo sequence	458
Appendix 5.3: Concast sequence	459
Appendix 6.1: Images of New Vic theatre stage	462
Appendix 6.2: Wilkinson scene	463
Appendix 6.3: 'We are women we are strong' lyrics	467

List of Figures

2.1: Alternative Lenses diagram	79
4.1: Research process table	104
4.2: Archival material – <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	113
4.3: Research process table 2	115
4.4: Archival material – <i>Nice Girls</i>	119
5.1: Polly	141
5.2: Foundry	143
5.3: Shower of sparks	144
5.4: Blazing pit	145
5.5: Tipping container	148
5.6: Peter Cheeseman	149
5.7: Polly	154
5.8: Image from <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	162
5.9: Archived material for Mill Meeting	175
5.10: Archived material for The process	230
6.1: Archived material for Wilkinson scene	377
6.2: Archived material for final speeches	388

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 The Research

You have to have the faith not to be afraid to be honest. This is the trouble with theatre nowadays – its nervousness to please too often makes it shallow. The most exciting experiences are hard.

(Peter Cheeseman quoted in Thornber 1970)

Between 1964 and 1993 Peter Cheeseman, artistic director of the Victoria and New Victoria theatres (also known as the Vic and New Vic), and his theatre company based in Stoke-on-Trent, pioneered a distinctive form of 'social documentary theatre', creating 11 social documentaries (verbatim) and 5 drama documentaries (scripted). The 11 documentaries focused on local history and contemporary events. Based entirely on interviews and documentary research conducted by actors and director these documentaries often drew from the narratives of older people. The documentaries effectively chart social, economic and political changes in the Potteries; reflect the community's self-image at various points in recent history; and illustrate the roles and positions of different generations within the community. *Fight for Shelton Bar!* (1972) and *Nice Girls* (1993) are two of these pioneering documentary dramas. Both were created from verbatim transcripts of interviews and other research material. All material relating to the productions have been archived and are currently kept at Staffordshire University.

The quotation above was made to the Methodists Cheeseman was interviewing for the documentary *The Burning Mountain*, performed at the Victoria theatre in 1970, but it equally relates to all of Cheeseman's documentary dramas. His 'faith' in his own community, in theatre-in-the-round and in bringing the theatre and the community together led him to create the documentaries and to offer his audiences an 'honest' version of stories about and for the local community. Cheeseman (1988) stated in his *Theatre Policy Statement* that 'I believe it is very important [...] to give utterance to the voice of the community itself, to tell stories from within the community that would not otherwise be heard'. He argued that documentary theatre places the individual and the local community within history, defining them as important parts of that history and in this way enabling those individuals and communities to recognise their own importance and 'making us feel important, because we live in the dimension of the present and we live in the dimension of the past' (Cheeseman 1988: 24). Though Cheeseman did not create theatre policy specifically for, or in relation to, older people, his work highlights his awareness of intergenerational issues and his desire for the theatre, primarily through the documentaries, to act as a bridge between these generations. This intergenerational link between past and present was essential to the community of Stoke-on-Trent where he felt 'a responsibility to place the life of my contemporaries in a historical perspective, and, in particular, the life of our community' (Cheeseman 1988: 24). The term 'community' is a contested, ever-changing and evolving term and one which Cheeseman never clearly defined.

In recent discourses about community the importance of embodied communities has been questioned and the idea of communities constructed through shared meanings and imaginings has been acknowledged (Cohen 1985, Anderson 1983). Community, then, is formed

within the self rather than through group interaction. This can be seen in the concept of imagined communities and also in the ideas of belonging, attachment and affect which come from viewing community from a combination of psychological and sociological thinking. This will be discussed further in the Understandings of Community section of Chapter Two.

I have attempted within this thesis to offer a similar honesty to Cheeseman by ‘showing’ as well as ‘telling’. The thesis mirrors Cheeseman by offering my findings as art pieces in the form of dramatic scripts, taken from verbatim interviews which ‘show’ the thematic threads running through the narratives and analytical commentaries which ‘tell’ and analyse the narratives. Like Cheeseman I am interested in community; but distinctively, and in line with the project to which this PhD contributes, my narrative focus lies with ageing and intergenerational relations within a life-course perspective. I seek to answer two main questions:

- **What narratives of the life-course, ageing and intergenerational relations do selected documentaries from Cheeseman’s repertoire, namely *Nice Girls* and *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, reveal?**
- **What kinds of impact did being involved with the Victoria theatre/New Vic documentaries have on individuals’ lives and their engagement with their community’?**

The thesis answers the first question by analysing three different types of narrative: narratives taken from a study of the documentaries themselves; narratives as seen through materials from the Victoria theatre archive, which enable me to trace the artistic formation of the documentaries and which include alternative stories and discourses to those which shaped the

finished documentaries; and contemporary narratives gathered from performers and original sources from both documentaries. I have chosen to explore these narratives by becoming both a 'storyteller' and a 'story analyst' (Smith and Sparkes 2008): in addition, I use 'narrative analysis', where the data can be taken from any kind of material and is made into a story by the researcher, who unites the data and gives meaning to it as a contribution to a narrative goal or purpose: and, finally, 'analysis of narrative', where the data, which is usually in a storied form, is disaggregated from separate narrative sequences and then re-united to create categories or themes (Polkinghorne 1995). This material is juxtaposed and layered in a form of bricolage (Etherington 2004) in order to gain further understandings of the data collected from the archive and from the literary analyses; in addition, this technique brings this material into the present in order to answer the second of my research questions. By linking the archival material with contemporary narratives I gain a picture of past and present narratives, from the same participants and from others within the same community, offering a life-course perspective of the impact which being involved in the documentaries had on the participants.

Contemporary narratives reveal the connections to the theatre and documentaries which participants find in conversation/relationship with me and from a reminiscence perspective. The first of my questions is also explored in this thesis through an in-depth exploration of the Victoria theatre archive. The material is then juxtaposed with interviews from the present. In this way I have linked the first and second thesis questions, exploring narratives of ageing and intergenerational relations as either implicit or explicit within the original documentaries and linking these to personal narratives relating to these documentaries and to the participants' involvement with the Vic and New Vic theatres and the community of

Stoke-on-Trent. It is through this layering of analysis that the thesis draws together thematic threads relating to community, family, intergenerational relationships, representation, shifting forms of engagement and ageing, looked at from a life-course perspective. The thesis argues that the Vic/New Vic theatre is a space that licences affective engagement. Consequently, the documentaries were layered performance spaces in which attitudes to ageing emerge, even though that was not the conscious or pre-determined focus of Cheeseman's work.

The results, contained in this thesis are, as Rambo-Ronai (1995) believes, creative presentation of research demands: subjective in nature and purposely designed to be evocative, to engage both emotionally and intellectually at each stage of the journey and in the sense-making process. This way of working was disorientating at first. I was aware that I would not be writing a 'standard' thesis and thus it would be difficult to follow others' proven lead in the development of the research and the formation of the thesis. As I will go on to discuss in Chapter Three, I felt myself to be like a performer in that by using reflexivity – as witnessed here within the autoethnography – I am my own 'primary instrument' (McLeod 2003: 72). As such I needed to be aware of the expectations that I bring to the research.

My research is part of – and linked with – the wider Ages and Stages project.¹ It ran alongside this project, both contributing to and drawing from it. Unlike the broader project, I adopt a very detailed and specific focus on the production process leading to two documentary dramas: *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls*. I focus on two groups of participants: members of the Vic and New Vic companies and participants/sources for the original documentaries. The in-

¹ For further information and details, see the Ages and Stages web site: <http://www.keele.ac.uk/agesandstages/>

depth qualitative nature of my research is such that the number of participants is necessarily restricted; my intention has been to work in detail with people's stories and to do justice to this complexity in my representation. My methodological approach complements that of the Ages the Stages project, which similarly draws on archival and interview material, but I ask more specific questions due to the focused nature of my research.

1.2 Making Connections Personal

Bochner challenges 'the myth that our research is divorced from our lives, that it has no autobiographical dimension, that what we do academically is not part of how we are working through the story of our own life' (2001: 138). This research is certainly not 'divorced' from my life. My research interests have their roots in my own autobiography and originate in my personal experience and its social context. Writers from across social science and humanities disciplines such as gerontology (Holstein and Minkler 2007; Bernard 2001), anthropology, (Becker 1999; Behar 1996), counselling and psychotherapy (Etherington 2004, 2005), education (Clough 2002), sociology (Ellis 1995; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Sparkes 1996, 2002, Richardson 1997) and literary criticism (Moi 1999, Greenblatt 2002, Knights 1999) similarly acknowledge the links between life experience and research interests. My own biography is bound up with the New Vic theatre and the community of Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire in which it sits. My working and academic life appears to have been moving towards this point and this research now forms the next step in my own life-course.

I moved back to Stoke-on-Trent, my home town, in my 20s in order to work at the New Vic as a stage manager. The geographical area of North Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent (also known as the Potteries), to which I keep returning, is an industrial community based on coal-mining, pottery-making, tyres and steel, all of which industries have now nearly or completely disappeared. It is an area of low geographical mobility. Recent surveys have supported the findings of Staffordshire University's 2000 study:

There are whole areas, particularly in the north of the county where people still live in the same street where they were born and are reluctant to move out [...] The close knit sense of community has contributed to an informal labour market where jobs are found for relatives and friends, and attainment and ability are less important. (Thomas and Slack 2000: 9)

The autoethnographic narrative presented below creates tensions between my own geographical mobility throughout my life-course and the reluctance to move out that characterises this population. The Vic theatre resolves this tension, in a manner of speaking, by getting people to 'move' emotionally and imaginatively. The Victoria and New Victoria theatres have longstanding connections with this community, which can be seen through the documentary dramas. In the early 1990s I worked alongside Cheeseman on a revival of one of the documentaries. Having then worked elsewhere in theatre and education for many years I was again drawn to the community of Stoke-on-Trent (and more precisely Keele University), to study an MSc in Counselling Psychology, discovering narrative methodological approaches to research and finding a great interest in working as a counsellor with older clients. For me this doctoral research opportunity was of interest academically and personally. Ruth Ray (2008) talks, from a gerontological perspective, of 'passionate scholarship', by which she means

research which has a personal resonance with the author, research which is intellectually rigorous but is also from the heart. This research is an example of 'passionate scholarship'.

A large part of this introduction uses autoethnography, a form of research that has been described as 'a blend of ethnography and autobiographical writing that incorporates elements of one's own life experience when writing about others' (Scott-Hoy 2002: 276); this makes it a form of self-narrative which places the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay 1997) and does so by combining inquiry into a cultural phenomenon with personal experience and reflection on its socio-cultural context. This introduction models the methodology of the thesis by using an autoethnographic play which is also a form of embodied reflexivity (Etherington 2004), accounting for, and making explicit, my positioning in relation to the research topic and to the methodology I have developed. The autoethnographic play introduces themes of community and my own ageing and life-course. By telling my own story I hope to contextualise the relational and inter-subjective stance I take throughout this study, as well as to illuminate my methodological choices.

1.3 Coming Full Circle – an autoethnographic play

(The play is written to be presented on the New Vic theatre stage and as such is a performance in-the-round. For an explanation of the stage directions please see appendix 1.1.)

The Characters:

RJ – A woman in her mid twenties. She speaks from the early 1990s

RB – A woman in her early to mid forties. She speaks from the current day

Both are dressed in jeans and casual tops. RB's clothes are designer labels. RJ's hair is long and tied back, RB's is short and styled. RJ has a tool belt round her waist containing chalk and anything else she might use throughout the scene. RB carries a designer handbag with her 'tools' inside.

Scene One:

The stage is bare apart from a black stage cloth which covers the acting area floor.

RB and RJ enter from DL and DR Voms and move to CR and CL. They direct their lines to the audience and, where specified, to each other.

RB and RJ both move to CS.

The audience hear the following line over the sound system

Both women's voices: From 1991 to 1994 I was an Assistant and then Deputy Stage Manager here at the New Vic.

RJ and RB use large chalks to draw a circle each on the stage covering their half of the stage and intersecting in the middle. When they have done this they stand in the middle of their own circles.

RJ: In the summer of 1991, when I was working in a theatre in Kent, I saw an advert in The Stage for an Assistant Stage Manager at the New Vic. I really felt my heart miss a beat. It was exactly what I wanted, had wanted for years. But I was really happy in my job, loved my colleagues and it had taken me some time to settle in Kent, so to uproot again and leave wasn't an easy decision. I applied anyway – couldn't miss out on this opportunity.

RB: You see, I come from Stoke-on-Trent originally. Well, not actually Stoke-on-Trent, but I was born in Leek and grew up in Alsager and went to

school in Hartshill – which is in Stoke -, so I've always felt part of Stoke-on-Trent and always felt connected to the New Vic.

RJ: Yes, absolutely. I have some vague memory of going to the old Vic when I was a kid, but I definitely remember them building and opening the New Vic. I love theatre-in-the-round – it just feels like the 'real' way to see a performance. You feel part of it; you don't have that separation between you and the action like you have in proscenium-arch theatres. It was something I realised I was really attracted to at University and there it was – the prime theatre-in-the-round example, right on my doorstep...

And it was exciting because it meant returning to my home area. I could see my friends again, be near my family and then have the experience to move onto the next challenge. Life was always about new challenges. I wanted the security of returning to my roots but the idea of 'settling down' and 'staying put' was not part of my plan. It was quite a shock then when Mum and Dad suggested I bought my first house in the Potteries.

RB: I guess it made sense financially to buy rather than rent and they really didn't like the uncertainty of my chosen career. My Dad had spent his life working in sales, only moving for promotional reasons and bedding down in what he considered to be a safe and stable career. But by the early 90s even Mum and Dad began to accept that life and work was changing and I think I pointed out more than once that at least if I lost my job it was something I

was used to. I could pick up another short-term contract elsewhere as long as I was willing to move around and keep my skills up to date.

RJ: Mum and Dad loaned me part of the money to buy the house in Penkhull, which made it all possible, especially as I'd taken quite a big pay cut to move to The New Vic. I took a lodger to ensure that I wasn't reliant on working all of the time.

RB: The Vic, like most theatres, had a digs list and my lodgers were normally actors who stayed for a season. They were ideal lodgers; never in during the day through rehearsals, and then not around in the evenings when performing and always disappearing to their real homes at weekends.

RJ: And we had some great first-night parties. Everybody came along, from directors to actors and back stage crew. There was never any division between performers and crew; we just all got along like a big group of friends.

RB: Of course there were quite a lot of 'very close friendships' formed during a run of a show.

RJ: Most of the company was still hired for a complete season at that time. So they would stay at the Vic for several months. Some of them lived in the area but a lot of them stayed in digs away from family. Most of the company was quite young and looking to play as hard as they worked. I was no exception.

RB takes a box from her bag before putting it down on the floor and moving to RJ. She kneels in front of RJ and opens the box to show a ring.

RJ: One of the actors asked me to marry him towards the end of one season.

RB puts the ring in its box (still open) down on the floor, puts on a hat and moves to the opposite side of the stage and stands looking cool but interested.

RJ: He was quite serious (RJ turns to look at RB) but I was far more interested in a musician working with the company.

RB takes off hat and becomes herself again, moving to the middle of her circle.

Lights down RJ and RB exit DL and UC

1.4 Reflections on Scene One

My own experience of living in Stoke and working at the New Vic was a 'coming home' in more ways than one. I felt I belonged to both the micro-community of the New Vic and its company and to the larger community of Stoke, though for me this 'belonging' was a complicated issue. I expected to have to move for employment reasons; my parents were of a different generation and found this hard to accept. In presenting my own life experiences through this play I have highlighted the fact that, as Bernard and Phillips (2000: 43) point out, 'the concept of a lifelong career in one occupation is fast vanishing'; this example of 'the fragmentation of the contemporary life-course' points to a need for 'strengthened links across the generations' in order to fight 'the possibility of intergenerational conflict'. The fragmentation which I encountered due to my choice of profession created in me a need to

retain ties with the community I had grown up within and to return to my family home on a regular basis, thus strengthening the links across generations, between myself and my parents. Ellis and Bochner suggest that autoethnographic researchers 'zoom backward and forward, inward and outward' and in the process 'distinctions between the personal and the cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition' (2000: 739). By using RJ to represent the 'me' as I was in the 1990s when I first worked at the Vic as a 25-year-old, and RB to represent the 46-year-old I am now, I have attempted to link my own life-course, past and present. Rather than showing a fragmentation of self I am suggesting a deeper unity. I draw on research showing how ageing has been considered in terms of the life-course or 'a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time' (Giele and Elder 1998: 22). Both women speak in the past tense and narrate the story, as both women have experienced this narrative. Ageing and developmental change, therefore, are continuous processes that are experienced throughout life. As such, the life-course reflects the intersection of social and historical factors with personal biography and development. We cannot understand RB fully without understanding RJ. In the same way we cannot understand older age without looking at the life-course.

1.5 Scene Two

Music plays (a 1990s hit) and RJ enters DL singing along.

RJ: I remember always singing or humming when I came through the front doors of the Vic and went upstairs to the admin offices to sign in for my day's work. It was a very happy place for me.

RB enters during this UC and stands UC

RB: I've always felt comfortable here. There was quite a long time after I left the Vic when I didn't have any involvement with it. I was busy working elsewhere and just didn't get chance to come back to visit often, but now I'm back, involved in researching some of the productions which were put on here in the past, it feels very much like coming home, just without the watchful eye of Peter.

RJ: If this was like a home to many of the company, as it was to me, then Peter Cheeseman, the artistic director, was most definitely the head of the household. His mark was everywhere and even as an ASM you knew he would need a say in some aspect of your job. He knew exactly what was going on in every nook and crevice of the place. He was well known for his political viewpoint, his love of this theatre and its surroundings – down to the tiniest detail – his knowledge and role in the development of theatre-in-the-round, and his documentary dramas which involved large parts of the Potteries community. For me, it was exciting to be around Peter, you could feel his fervour.

RJ: In my first year at the New Vic I became an Equity deputy.

RB: That meant that I represented the performing company in any union issues.

RJ: It was a role no-one seemed to want and in most theatres it wasn't a very sought-after position as it often puts you up against the management of the theatre; as that includes the artistic director and production manager, who are the people you are reliant upon for future work, it's not such a good idea to get involved.

RB: I was young and principled and got stuck in!

RJ: Luckily for me, Peter was very much in favour of the unions and ran his theatre by strict union rules. My job was really to ensure that visiting directors abided by the rules, which gave me a kind of inflated role.

RB: I was certainly noticed and paid more attention to than I would have been as a lowly assistant stage manager. I am very proud of the fact that Peter called me 'a character' when I left, something which I thought, and still believe, was a great compliment.

RJ: My involvement with Peter really deepened when I deputy stage-managed a documentary which he directed: The Jolly Potters.

RB: It was a revival of the original which was put on in the 60s. I had heard of the musical documentary dramas but I had completely the wrong idea about what to expect! I'd worked on Good Golly Miss Molly which was a

musical based in the Potteries and a 'sort of' documentary, full of 60s' songs you could sing along to and a storyline.

RJ: The Jolly Potters wasn't quite so jolly.

RB: I'm sure that working on an original documentary was really interesting and a great creative process.

RJ: Working on a revival was not so exciting; the members of the acting company had less creative input than they might have had on a play and were expected to be at every rehearsal to take part in the process. I could feel the company slipping into negativity and I could also sense Peter's total absorption with the project.

RB: For the actors it was just another show; they hadn't been involved in the research and barely had any connections with the local area, but for Peter it still held all of the connections and meanings which it had had 30 years earlier and he expected the actors to be as involved in it and excited by it as he was.

RJ: I think I encouraged Peter to call fewer actors to rehearsals so that they could have a break, and I was really aware that I was trying to look after Peter more than the actors. I was annoyed that they couldn't see his excitement, that they couldn't acknowledge they were working with someone who had created a whole new genre of theatre, that this was an opportunity to work alongside someone who was and would be studied at

university. (during these last lines RJ has become very animated) I was quite in awe! (pause) and had a huge respect for the man and his work.

RB: It's the main reason why I'm back involved with the Vic now. I couldn't resist the chance to do some academic study of Peter's musical documentaries. And I wanted to feel part of that world I left nearly 20 years ago but I don't think I had any dreams of re-living those days.

RJ: No, but I did find it hard to move on when I worked at the Vic. Somehow I needed to move on, even though I loved it there. There were no openings any higher up the stage-management career ladder and I was getting bored of being the lowest of the low.

RB: I was never any good at taking orders.

RB picks up her bag and gestures for RJ to leave the stage. RJ refuses. RB exits, leaving RJ standing on stage. The lights fade to black and as they do RJ looks around and runs off stage following RB.

1.6 Reflections on Scene Two

One of the themes that the *Ages and Stages* project discovered and which is also discussed in my own research is that of the Vic as 'family': a place where audience, staff and performers felt comfortable and had a sense of belonging. As Bernard (2012) points out, this was particularly evident amongst people who had worked at the theatre in the 1960s, 70s and early 80s. For me, as an employee in the early 1990s, the theatre still retained a familial and comfortable feel about it. It was run as a tight ship with everyone answering to Cheeseman,

whose attention to detail was immense and often infuriating but was also a facet of his desire to make the theatre as welcoming, tidy and comfortable back stage as it was front of house. Cheeseman appreciated people who put themselves out for the theatre and wanted to be a part of the local community (as I had shown by buying my own house and becoming Equity representative). His belief that the theatre should be a 'family' and form a part of the community in which it sat was shown not only through the documentary dramas but also the use of a permanent acting company, which he attempted to retain for many years after most theatres had moved onto employing actors per production, thus saving themselves a considerable amount of money. Whilst I loved being a part of this 'family' at the theatre, I did not need or require another father figure. I did not like 'taking orders' or being the lowest in this 'family' hierarchy and so I moved on.

1.7 Scene Three:

RB enters UC and moves to CS. There is a spotlight on her.

RB: I know I'm not old but when I worked out that it was nearly 20 years since I worked here – well – I didn't feel like a bright young thing for a while. I guess being a student again, at my age, also brings home the age gap. My research involves me looking at the role this theatre has had on people's recollections of ageing, which makes me think about my own ageing process. (pause)

Sometimes I feel a lot older than I am.

RJ enters DR and moves to RB, she takes a makeup pencil from her tool belt and draws exaggerated age lines on RB's face. RJ moves to the steps SR and sits.

The biggest impact M.S. has had on my life since I was diagnosed five years ago has been to take away a lot of my energy.

RJ moves to RB and rubs some chalk into her hair, making it appear greyish. She moves to sit on the steps SL.

I get aches and pains in my legs and I have some problems with my eyes, on and off. Most of all I have an awareness that things may stop working at any time, a greater awareness of my own mortality and frailty, brought home a lot earlier than I expected them to be.

I just can't do all the things I want to do anymore.

RJ looks annoyed, gets up and moves to RB, taking her hands and spinning her round in a circle then running with her around the stage. RB keeps up.

RJ: Everything in moderation?

RB: Exactly.

RB carefully takes out a mirror and face-wipe from her bag. RJ holds the mirror while RB removes the lines from her face. She takes out a brush and brushes the chalk from her hair. RJ gives the mirror back to RB who puts it in her bag.

RB: I'm now a qualified counsellor. I specialise in working with older people, the bereaved and people with life-changing illness. I've had quite a varied career but it's always involved performance until that move into counselling. People ask me where the career-move came from and I don't really know: there are so many avenues that seemed to lead in the same direction.

Ever since my days at the New Vic I have had involvement with unions; I've been a union rep in most of my jobs and I really believe in standing up for the rights of the individual, in letting people's voices be heard.

Maybe that is why counselling felt like the logical next step for me. It was a way of enabling people to be heard. Helping them to open up to me and, more importantly, to themselves.

RJ: So perhaps the Vic's impact on me has lasted a lot longer and gone a lot further than I originally thought.

RB: In the summer of 2009, when I had just finished my Masters degree in counselling and was living in Congleton and about to start a private practice as a counsellor, I saw an advert on the web for a PhD student linked to a project called Ages and Stages. I really felt my heart miss a beat. It was exactly what I wanted. But I was really happy as a counsellor, loved working with clients and it had taken me some time to get the qualifications and experience to start the practice. To change direction again wasn't an easy decision. I applied anyway – couldn't miss out on this opportunity.

RB and RJ both move to CS.

The Audience hear the following line over the sound system

Both women's voices: From 2009 to 2013 I'll be a researcher at Keele exploring the New Vic.

RB and RJ bow and exit up CL and CR stairs, through the audience.
Blackout.

1.8 Reflections on Scene Three

The autoethnographic play which has just concluded is circular in form. I was attempting to resist a purely linear narrative and in so doing aimed to highlight the nature of a life-course approach to ageing which 'stresses that the potential for development extends throughout life and that development is multidirectional and can occur on a number of different fronts' (Bernard, Chambers and Granville 2000: 13). An awareness of my own ageing has been highlighted for me through illness. The image of RJ marking RB with lines on her face and white in her hair shows how ageing affects women's identity and how women are subjected to 'ageist standards of appearance' (Gerike 1990: 41). This autoethnography places me firmly within this research as well as making a small contribution to the critical gerontological call to 'hear women speak for themselves' in relation to ageing (Bernard, Chambers and Granville 2000: 5).

1.9 Research Bricolage

This thesis has been formed using what Etherington (2004) and others (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, Holstein and Minkler 2007, Yardley 2008) refer to as 'bricolage'. In this thesis the term 'bricolage' relates to fragmented narrative, pastiche, layering and can function politically to encourage multiple perspectives which disrupt and complicate linear modes of reading and understanding; yet the interpretations are not unlimited, as the author still structures the materials on which reading will be based. This arrangement and rearrangement of disparate but related threads of information becomes an essential process of analysis which enables me

to work in a non-linear way. Whilst my process of working has been a rhizomatic one, I draw on further metaphors to explain how I have worked methodologically. The participants' narratives, presented as plays within the thesis, are intended to offer a 'narrative analysis' in themselves; these are also layered with my own 'analysis of narrative', to adopt Polkinghorne's terms (Polkinghorne 1995). These plays are then juxtaposed with literary analyses of the original documentaries, creating what Denzin and Lincoln describe as a 'complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage' (2005: 6). My own methodological bricolage, created by using an interdisciplinary mix of social science, literary analysis and performative social science, has been chosen to answer my two key research questions and to offer a response which engages the 'gerontological imagination' (Ray 2008: 3).

The decision to employ a literary narrative model within this thesis meant that the plays which are embedded in the main body of the thesis have privileged literary form over dramatic form. I chose to work in this way primarily due to the interdisciplinary nature of the research. It was important to acknowledge that the narratives needed to be analysed in a way which was accessible to a number of audiences, including being seen from a social science perspective. Whilst I have, to some extent, exploited dramatic techniques within the scripts for their presentation to a theatre audience, I have held firmly to the participant's narratives as being the central facet of the research and analysis. I was concerned that by using a greater degree of dramatic licence and by engaging dramaturgical commentary as an analytical tool, I would focus the thesis on my own plays rather than the participant's narratives. I was aware that I would be engaging a creative ethic to a far greater degree than would have been appropriate for the interdisciplinary, academic audience to which it would be initially presented. Whilst wanting to

create a space for the ‘audience’ to imaginatively feel their way into the experiences described, I was very aware that my main focus was on telling the ‘truth’ as narrated by the participants. In future iterations of the plays and analysis, created for a different ‘audience’, I would take into account dramaturgical considerations and terms which do not appear within this thesis. It would be useful in this future iteration of the research to consider further the tensions between aesthetic function and verbatim content both within Cheeseman’s documentaries and within the dramatic scripts created as part of this thesis, exploring this particular tension to a far greater extent than is strictly relevant to the argument of this thesis. In order to explore these tensions more precisely, the use of specialist dramaturgical terminology is required: Spencer (2002) defines an A-Z of dramaturgical terms from the perspective of a playwright, which could be developed in relation to my own plays. For instance, a ‘dramatic situation’ might enable future work to reflect critically on latent ideas of ‘action’ (what a character wants) and ‘conflict’ (something that prevents a character from getting what they want). Such explicit critical reflections and analyses could make explicitly dramatic ‘subtexts’ more readily available. However, that is beyond the academic purview of this particular thesis.

1.10 Literary Analysis

Having gathered the narratives from my participants and begun to piece together the dramatic scripts in this thesis (which are written in a style informed by Cheeseman’s documentaries), I acknowledged a need to return to the original documentaries, first to *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and later to *Nice Girls*, in order to analyse how Cheeseman and his company

had themselves explored ageing, intergenerational relations and life-course within the community of Stoke-on-Trent and to add a further layer to the research bricolage.

I chose these two documentaries primarily because of their differences. *Fight for Shelton Bar!* (1974), was one of the earlier documentaries, and *Nice Girls* (1993), was the last. Whilst there were yet-earlier documentaries that I could have drawn on, I realised that I would struggle to find participants from these documentaries who were still in the area or possibly even still alive, thus *Fight for Shelton Bar!* became a good choice for pragmatic reasons. Furthermore, both productions represented the industrial past of the Potteries. Shelton Bar, sadly now demolished, was a steelworks based in Stoke. The documentary portrays the battle between the Shelton Works Action Committee and the British Steel Corporation over plans to close down operations at this North Staffs steelworks. The fight began in 1972 and the Vic documentary 'team' began to be involved in October 1973, on the invitation of the Action Committee. Peter Cheeseman, Polly Warren, Romy Saunders and Graham Watkins made over 100 hours of recorded interviews over the next four months, and documented the entire steel-making process. *Nice Girls* was created from verbatim transcripts of interviews with the four women involved in an occupation of one of the coal pits in Stoke-on-Trent during the early 1990s mining disputes; this material was supplemented by the input of the women during rehearsals.

Fight for Shelton Bar! also made connections between the community of Shelton Bar steel works and that of the Vic theatre. In the introduction to the published version of the documentary Cheeseman states:

All the years I had worked in Stoke I had passed Shelton Bar on my way to Hanley to shop, and thought to myself how lucky I was to be in an exciting and fulfilling job compared to what I imagined was the mucky drudgery of the steelworks. The revelation to me was the attachment that the steelmen had to their jobs, mixed with pride, with real dignity, sometimes even exultation. Around the edge are the inevitable wanderers and drifters. At the core is a total and historic dedication. It is very hard to convey this quality to middle-class people whose understandings are distorted by the shallow philosophies of commerce. (Cheeseman 1977: 56)

Fight for Shelton Bar! highlights connections between the theatre and the community, it describes and documents a particular political and social phenomenon within the community at a specific time. Whilst the theme of ageing is implicit rather than explicit within the finished documentary, Cheeseman told the steel workers of his desire to focus on the older members of the steel community as well as the intergenerational impact which the closure of the works would have.² Like the majority of the documentaries, *Fight for Shelton Bar!* is male dominated. The analysis of *Nice Girls* thus enabled me to look at ageing and the life-course in relation to female gender expectations as it is the only documentary that focuses on women and includes them as its protagonists.

In carrying out narrative interviews and then analysing the productions I was aware of mixing the roles of social-science researcher and textual scholar, a mix which meant that I explored the narratives of sources who took part in the original documentaries, through those documentaries. The voices of the original sources were present within the documentaries, but

² Cheeseman was introduced to the steel workers when he began the research process and addressed them in groups to explain what the documentary would be about and that these were areas that he was interested in focusing on. The audio recording of this address is held in the archive.

had been filtered through the documentary research committee and I, like the audience, was only hearing what was chosen for me to hear. With my literary researcher hat firmly upon my head I explored the archive for the original transcripts and early versions of the scripts in order to discover not only what had been included in the documentaries but also what had been omitted.

1.11 Thesis Structure

This thesis is arranged as follows: Chapter Two begins by placing the Vic/New Vic theatre's documentaries into context whilst also exploring the literature surrounding documentary drama, Cheeseman and the history of his theatres. I highlight the links between the documentaries and present-day verbatim theatre as well as acknowledging the influences which shaped Cheeseman and his documentary productions from the 1960s to the 1990s. The chapter moves on to review literature at the intersection between the arts and critical and social gerontology, exploring issues around ageing and intergenerational relationships in relation to community, age identity, representation, women and retirement.

Chapters Three and Four focus on the methodology and methods used within this research, discussing how I made my methodological choices and the sources on which I drew to create the methodological bricolage described above. Chapters Five and Six explore the two documentary dramas *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls*. They juxtapose sections of narrative analysis from my interviews, presented as dramatic scripts, with literary analyses of the documentaries, comparing the original archived material with the finished production and

highlighting what has been included and omitted, particularly in regard to ageing and older members of the community. Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by discussing connections, similarities and differences between the documentaries and across the narratives. It looks at the thematic strands discovered through this research and discusses the limitations of the research, the originality of the research and the contribution to knowledge which the thesis offers. It concludes by discussing how the research fits with other current literature and offers possibilities for future research.

Chapter Two

Context and Intersections

The Introduction to this thesis has described this research, its distinctive character and how I have used a methodological bricolage incorporating literary analysis, narrative analysis and performative social science. The primary purpose of this chapter is to review the literature at the intersection between the arts and critical gerontology, exploring issues around ageing and intergenerational relationships in relation to community, age identity, representation, women and retirement. Prior to embarking on this part of the review, however, I establish one of the main conceptual and contextual frameworks in which Cheeseman and the Victoria/New Victoria theatre's documentary drama sit: theatre history and performance studies. In keeping with the methodology used for this research and to continue to stress the importance of narrative to the research, I have given this part of this literature review a narrative structure: I explore the origins of some of Cheeseman's initial philosophical and theatrical values, in order better to understand the context of the Vic documentary; I then look at how these ideas were further developed within both the Vic documentaries and later forms of verbatim theatre. I also highlight relevant key historical events and their social contexts in order to show that ageing and identity, as represented through the narratives within this research, are social processes, rooted in a specific social and cultural time and place and, as such, can be infinitely variable (Hockey and James 2003).

I continue, in the second section of this literature review, to look at ageing, age identity and the life-course in relation to theatre, and at the intersection between critical gerontology

and the arts. My work does not centre on 'old age'. Instead, it looks at the process of ageing throughout the life-course, not only in terms of the individual but also in terms of the institution of the Vic and New Vic theatres. For example while the Vic was not a theatre designed specifically to engage with older people, the Vic documentaries do include material relating to the life-course, and Cheeseman often deploys ageing and older members of the community as a rhetorical trope. Attitudes to ageing emerge, even though that is not the conscious or pre-determined focus of the work. The documentaries also sometimes elide or omit material relating to ageing as I found happening within the archival work I carried out examining *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls*. This is interesting because it highlights the key narratives and themes which Cheeseman is focusing on within the documentaries which are often in tension with the focus of this thesis.

2.1 The Vic Documentary Drama in Context

The beginnings of documentary drama can be traced as far back as 492BC when Phrynichus is believed to have produced his play *The Capture of Miletus* in response to an unsuccessful plea by an Athenian to his fellow men to take part in a revolt. The play seems to have had specific political and aesthetic aims and was heavily censured. The play was received by the entire audience with shock and horror as it reminded them 'of a calamity that was their very own' (Greene 1987: 416-7) that had happened only two years previously. From the very start documentaries appear to have affected their audiences and brought communities in touch with their own actions. This can be seen as positive, as Cheeseman perceived it to be, or

negative as the audience did in 492BC and as some critics, audience members and members of the press have done ever since. At a post-show discussion of Alecky Blythe's documentary *Where Have I been All my Life?* on 12 April 2012 at the New Vic theatre, one audience member was moved to tears with anger at the way the documentary had presented the people of Stoke-on-Trent. At the same time she expressed her support and appreciation for Cheeseman's documentary work. It would appear that this audience member did not see Blythe's documentary as a celebration of her community, presented from a position of deep understanding, an aim which Cheeseman strived throughout his career to achieve.

The documentary tradition has continued to change and evolve over time, with a focus on commemorating events and happenings; examples include the 'domestic tragedy' – tragedies based on real-life murder cases – of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and later sensational theatre. Yet it is perhaps the work of Erwin Piscator (1893-1966) that can be seen as the starting point for Cheeseman's and contemporary documentary theatre. Piscator's agit-prop theatre in Germany, following the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, defined documentary theatre as Cheeseman came to see it. Favorini supports this view saying that

Piscator's practice effectively generates a definition of documentary drama as plays characterized by a central or exclusive reliance on actual rather than imaginary events, on dialogue, song and/or visual materials (photographs, films, pictorial documents) 'found' in the historical record or gathered by the playwright/researcher, and by a disposition to set individual behaviour in an articulated political and/or social context. (Favorini 1995: xx)

Like Cheeseman, Piscator was working from documentary material; he aimed to 'get beyond scenes from life, beyond the purely individual aspect of the characters and the fortuitous

nature of their lives' (1980, 93). In order to achieve this, Piscator used his theatre to 'show the link between the events on stage and the great forces active in history' (93). Piscator's comments link directly to Cheeseman's views about documentary theatre, which were clearly expressed within his own Theatre Policy Statement (Cheeseman 1988), when he states that the New Vic theatre will 'Explore and reflect the life and history of the local community on the stage and in the exhibition areas'. The difference is that Piscator stressed the 'world historical' dimensions of theatre – in tune with the internationalism and Marxism of Brecht, with whom he worked.

Cheeseman's policy statement becomes more explicit when it states that the theatre sets out to achieve its aims by, for example, 'Consistently undertaking research into the life and history of the local community in co-operation with playwrights and towards the presentation of documentary productions' (see appendix 2.1). Similarly, in an article entitled 'Documentary Theatre – A Professional Repertory Theatre Perspective' (1986) Cheeseman discusses with Roy Nevitt many of his beliefs about documentary theatre and its position within the community. For Cheeseman, the Vic was a way of enabling the community to speak to itself; the theatre took the place of older people within a village community and their role of passing on stories to the younger generation. He believed that in today's communities stories are no longer passed on to the next generation as they once were: 'parents are separated from children, children are separated from parents and grandparents. The old people do not talk to the young people to anything like the extent they used to' (Cheeseman as quoted in Nevitt 1986: 24). For Cheeseman, the press and media become a 'distorting mirror' when they attempt to take on this role, whereas the theatre, through the documentaries, is able to tell relevant narratives

using modest and humble stories of real life, subjective experiences in which the larger media would not be interested. Thus Cheeseman believes that it is the theatre's role to 'look for important stories which the community could tell to itself' (Nevitt 1986: 25).

Whilst Piscator's ideologies are reflected to some extent in Cheeseman's work, they can also be seen through a number of American theatre practitioners who visited Piscator in the USSR after he fled there in 1931 to avoid the Nazis. Piscator's techniques and those of The Living Newspaper (the documentary, newsreel-like presentation of current events) were taken back to the United States, then undergoing the Great Depression. Arent (1971) describes The Living Newspaper not as a dramatisation of an event but rather of a '*problem* – composed in greater or lesser extent of many news events, all bearing on the one subject and interlarded with typical but non-factual representations of the effect of these news events on the people to whom the problem is of great importance' (57). Whilst Cheeseman drew on The Living Newspaper's techniques, his aim was to create factual representations and to work with 'actuality' rather than working with a combination of news events and non-factual representations which Arent describes.

The term 'actuality' was coined by John Grierson. A contemporary of Piscator's, Grierson also first used the term 'documentary film', describing it as 'the creative treatment of actuality' (Grierson 1966: 13). Grierson argued that the documentary narrative 'must be taken from the location, and that it should be the essential story of the location' (Grierson 1966: 148). This thesis highlights links between Grierson's ideas and Cheeseman's desire to create documentaries for the theatre in Stoke-on-Trent from narratives created within Stoke-on-Trent.

Although Grierson worked with 'actuality' he still recognised the role of the documentary maker as the teller of the story. Documentary, for Grierson, involved 'arrangements, rearrangements and creative shapings of natural material' (Grierson 1966: 146). For Grierson and for this thesis 'point of view' becomes a crucial issue.

Cheeseman acknowledged the importance of his own point of view within the process of creating a documentary, but he created a tension between his and Grierson's ideas by suggesting that working with a team of researchers to put the documentaries together prevented them from becoming 'Cheeseman pudding' (Thornber 1970), or one person's creative interpretation of the 'actuality'. Whilst Cheeseman may have avoided creating 'Cheeseman pudding', his documentaries nonetheless have to present 'actuality' within tight boundaries: they must create a piece of 'entertainment' observing all of the time-restrictions of a theatre production, and satisfy a desire to create an entertaining narrative structure. It could also be argued that Cheeseman's becomes the dominant creative 'voice' because he is the only person to work on all of the documentaries. I explore this productive discord between narrative, actuality and creativity through and within the source analysis sections of this thesis.

Another crucial influence on Cheeseman was the theatre of Bertold Brecht. Writing in Germany and then America between 1918 and 1956, Brecht created a new form of theatre, epic theatre. Whilst Brecht's work is not documentary drama, his theories sit alongside the idea of the discord between narrative, creativity and actuality, and his style of presentation and acting clearly had a major influence on Cheeseman. Brecht attempted to ensure that his

audiences were aware that they were viewing a 'demonstration' and not an actual event. In his explanation of epic theatre he describes 'The street scene', saying:

I usually picked as my example of complete simple 'natural' epic theatre an incident such as can be seen at any street corner: an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place. The bystanders may not have observed what happened, or they may simply not agree with him, may 'see things in a different way'; the point is that the demonstrator acts the behavior of driver or victim or both in such a way that the bystanders are able to form an opinion about the accident. (Brecht 1968: 85)

He argues that this is the essence of epic theatre and is the core of the acting method with which his actors work. The performance must contain all of the elements of this street scene to fulfil the epic form and must exclude what Brecht describes as 'the engendering of illusion' (1968: 86). Theatre stops pretending to be the real event and admits that what the audience is seeing is a demonstration of something which has happened before. In this way the drama 'makes the spectator an observer but awakens his capacity to act', 'the spectator confronts something and is made to study what he sees' and man is shown as 'producing himself in the course of the action, and therefore subject to criticism and to change' (Williams 1987: 278). Brecht offered his actors techniques for helping them to report on the action, such as working in the third person and speaking directly to the audience, and he also used theatrical and staging techniques such as choruses, projection and music as means to comment on the action, to ensure that the audience remain free from any 'illusion' of the stage. Cheeseman used these techniques for similar purposes, as I discuss in Chapter Five.

Around the same time as *The Living Newspaper* was commenting upon life in America and Brecht was creating his epic theatre form, Unity Theatre was formed in the United Kingdom. This communist group, formed in 1934 and influenced by the methods of *The Living*

Newspaper and Arthur Arent, grew from the *Workers' Theatre Movement*, and was based in London (Chambers 1989). It attempted to bring contemporary issues to a working-class audience by creating plays by and for workers. The company is of relevance to this thesis for its use of the pioneering dramatic form of company-devised documentary pieces and its development of 'a drama that represented working-class life and speech with insight and integrity' (Chambers 1989: 17). Unity Theatre also spawned a number of branches around the country and there was – and still is – for example, a Unity Theatre in Liverpool and a Unity Theatre Trust (and its archive) in London. According to *The New York Times'* book review of Chambers' 1989 book *The Story of Unity Theatre*, 'it finally expired in 1983 because it represented a spirit of old-fashioned opposition and could not find its place in a more strident and increasingly prosperous age' (Peter 1990). It is interesting that Cheeseman's final documentary *Nice Girls* was created in 1993 (with *The Dirty Hill* being the first documentary created at the New Vic in 1990), some ten years after the demise of Unity Theatre, and relevant that this type of political standpoint, as represented throughout Cheeseman's documentaries, could still remain popular within the community of Stoke-on-Trent. If we acknowledge *The New York Times'* reasoning for the demise of Unity Theatre, then the extension of the popularity of documentary theatre in Stoke-on-Trent could be associated with the area's economic decline.

Following the same tradition, Theatre Union, founded in 1936 in Manchester by Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood, stated in its manifesto:

Theatre Union is Manchester's contribution to the forces of democracy. It has set itself the task of establishing a complete theatre unit consisting of producers, actors, writers, artists and technicians, which will present to the widest possible

public, and particularly to that section of the public which has been starved theatrically, plays of social significance. (MacColl 1990: 228)

Like Cheeseman, MacColl and Littlewood had chosen to bring theatre 'of social significance' to a community which had not previously been offered theatre, or documentary theatre, relevant to itself; it thus sought to empower those communities. MacColl and Littlewood's company went on to produce *Living Newspaper, the Last Edition* (1940) which looked at the Spanish Civil War and other conflicts leading up to the Munich pact with Hitler. The production was raided and Littlewood was arrested for giving an unlicensed public performance³, throwing the company into disarray before production was stopped by the war (Harker 2009: 17).

Ewan MacColl's connections to documentary, and to Cheeseman, go beyond his involvement with Theatre Union. Between 1957 and 1964, MacColl continued John Grierson's radio documentary work, creating the script and songs for a series of one-hour radio-ballads for the BBC in Birmingham, based on 'recorded actuality from members of the public' (Seeger 2012). Production and editing of these radio-ballads was carried out by Charles Parker, who Cheeseman acknowledges as a key influence on his own musical documentary work. Parker's primary contribution to documentary, and to Cheeseman's work, was to 'recognise the enormous value of the kind of language that we ordinary folk take for granted in our everyday conversations' (Parker 2012). In a lecture which he gave in 1962, Parker says that from having

³ At this time theatrical production was still controlled by the Lord Chamberlain's office, which had to approve scripts.

recorded 160 taped interviews with railway men for *The Ballad of John Axon* (1957), he realised that he had found ‘the real voice of England, of the common people’ (Parker 1962) and that he did not need to embellish the words further. Parker also linked this recognition of the creative importance of the oral tradition to its relationship with folk music, and used both recorded spoken actuality and folk music within his work. Cheeseman’s own work continued this tradition, as he used folk music and recorded actuality throughout his documentaries. Cheeseman stated in 1986 ‘that the interplay of song and speech’ was very much part of his documentary style and that this style

has ended up at the moment where it is, very much because of the influence of Charles Parker, and Charles Parker as filmed by Philip Donnellan with tremendous respect for the enormous capacity of songs and music created within what we call the folk tradition. I suppose the language that is in my head all the time is the dialect, if you like, created by Charles Parker and Ewan MacColl in their radio ballads. (Nevitt 1986)

Cheeseman’s self-conscious choice of words here and his description of dialect as a ‘language’, highlight his own use of Potteries’ dialect within the documentaries. It is a language of the working-class community and is used without explanation or apology by Cheeseman.⁴ Parker was also a founder, writer, singer and actor with Banner Theatre in Birmingham from 1974-1980. Banner supported and worked alongside the Stoke-on-Trent Miners Wives’ Action Group singers both before and during their involvement in Cheeseman’s *Nice Girls* documentary; this

⁴ I have also used local dialect within my plays in this thesis and have attempted to punctuate and spell in a way that helps the reader to ‘hear’ the local voices as I heard them in the interviews.

area is explored further within my own play *Nice Girls Round the Corner – The Middle*, later in this thesis.

In 1945, Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood re-formed their company, calling it Theatre Workshop, and moved to Kendal in Cumbria where they produced classical and modern 'working-class' plays. They then moved again to the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London. In 1963 Littlewood directed *Oh! What a Lovely War*, an anti-war, musical documentary. This documentary about the First World War was researched by the actors and became probably the most influential theatre documentary of the twentieth century, introducing the 'European epic theatre methodology into British theatre' (Paget 1990: 68). Paget believes that *Oh! What a Lovely War* had such an impact on British theatre and documentary drama because it fulfilled four purposes: to reassess the past, to celebrate the past, to investigate topical events or issues, and to explain, in a didactic sense, social historical and political phenomena (Paget 1990). It is little wonder then that when Cheeseman saw Littlewood's production of *Oh! What a Lovely War* he recognised a theatrical methodology which fitted his own socialist tendencies and his fascination with history, and which encouraged him to work within his community, recognising that community as central and of historical value and import. Cheeseman created his first musical documentary with the Vic theatre company, *The Jolly Potters*, in 1964, and he admits that 'I began because I saw *Oh! What a Lovely War*' (Nevitt 1986: 8).

Philip Donnellan (1924-1999), mentioned above, was a further major influence on the Vic and on documentary. His initial influence on Cheeseman was as a film-maker and television producer; in these roles he made a large contribution to the development of television

documentary and our social understanding of post-war Britain. In his BBC films *The Colony* (1964), *The Irishmen* (1965) and *Strangers in Town* (1969), Donnellan explored the lives of migrant communities in the West Midlands and ‘allowed the voices and experiences of locally based migrant communities to be represented for themselves with dignity and respect’ (Donnellan 2006). Like Donnellan, Cheeseman sought to allow the voices of the underprivileged and underrepresented within Stoke-on-Trent to be heard, and he used his documentaries to achieve this aim. The National Film Theatre hosted a retrospective tribute to Donnellan, claiming him as ‘a remarkable television producer and film maker, whose work created poetic realism worthy of Humphrey Jennings⁵ with a concern for social reform passionate in his determination to provide a platform for the “grossly ignored”’ (*ibid*). Cheeseman respected and was influenced by Donnellan, who in turn went on, in 1974, to produce a TV documentary about the fight to save Shelton Bar steel works, commenting on the Vic’s support for the workers and their current production of *Fight for Shelton Bar!* The documentary was broadcast only after a dispute with the BBC, who cut the original length of the film to 35 minutes.

In 1965, the year after Cheeseman premiered *The Jolly Potters* (which used historical ‘actuality’ but not interview material), Peter Weiss, a Swedish-born playwright working in Germany, wrote and presented his production of *The Investigation* about the Holocaust and subsequent war trials which he had attended. Weiss used transcripts from the trials to create

⁵ Humphrey Jennings (1907-1950) was an English documentary film maker and a founder of the Mass Observation organisation which aimed to record everyday life in Britain through a panel of around 500 untrained volunteer observers who either maintained diaries or replied to open-ended questionnaires. Jennings work was a particular influence on Cheeseman’s attitude to data collection and thus on the archive.

his drama, prefiguring the tribunal plays (dramatic reconstructions of public inquiries based on verbatim transcripts) pioneered by the Tricycle Theatre Company in London in the 1990s. Cheeseman's documentaries followed in Weiss's footsteps by incorporating transcribed actuality from *The Knotty* (1966) onwards.

Whilst Cheeseman's 'Stoke method' drew from all that had gone before, he set out to find his own theatrical language and to discover his own rules. These developed and altered over the thirty-five years during which he fashioned them at the Vic and New Vic theatres, although his aim remained the same: to give voice to the local community. Cheeseman's 'Stoke method' for making documentaries involved a process which took at least six months of research, initially by Cheeseman and then with the help of a research committee made up of actors and members of the company. For Cheeseman, his documentaries were only allowed to use

'actuality' which consisted of actual utterance in documentary form. It can be in written form (that is reported form by participants or eye witnesses of actual events) or spoken material collected by us by means of the tape recorder from actual participants or witnesses of actual events. (Nevitt 1986: 7)

The Stoke method allowed nothing to be made up or invented and did not allow the use of a writer. It did, however, allow the use of music and songs which became 'the bloodstream that pulses through [the documentary] in the absence of the central character with whom you associate' (Nevitt 1986: 8). Music became 'a fundamental tool' for Cheeseman allowing the documentary to lose some of the 'dryness' which Cheeseman believed is created by the split of focus of attention which so many characters and such a great deal of information can create. It

allowed 'stylistic experiments to take place' and freed the documentaries from some of their rigid rules by allowing 'a sort of narrative freedom without disrupting the sense of authority' (Nevitt 1986: 8). Songs in which the 'words are more important than the music' sat alongside 'people's ordinary speech, reproduced in a simple and direct fashion' and the combination of these things, using only 'actuality', became what Cheeseman saw as the Stoke method. He states: 'that interplay, I think, will be my creative language for documentary till I'm in my box' (Nevitt 1986: 8). Cheeseman's desire to use only 'actuality' defined the direction and narrative of the documentaries whilst the music acted as comment and often lightened the atmosphere, giving the audience a break from 'fact'. As the use of actuality is so fundamental to Cheeseman's documentaries I will now go on to explore the history and literature surrounding this notion.

2.2 Actuality

In 1968, Peter Weiss presented a manifesto containing fourteen propositions for a documentary theatre. Weiss discusses how 'The realistic Theatre of Actuality' has taken a number of forms including agit-prop, Piscator's experimental forms of theatre and the didactic theatre of Brecht (quoted in Brandt 1998: 247). He does not refer to Cheeseman's documentary drama, though writing in 1968 in Germany it is possible that he had not encountered his work at this point. Weiss believed that documentary theatre 'refrains from all invention', taking 'authentic material' and putting it onto a stage 'unaltered in content, edited in form' (247). He argues that 'A Documentary Theatre which is to be a political forum first of all, and which

renounces aesthetic considerations, calls its right to exist into question' (248). This perspective is echoed in Chapter Six of this thesis and links closely with Cheeseman's views and his desire to avoid what he called 'political claptrap' (Graham Woodruff 1995). For Weiss, as for Cheeseman, narrative lies at the centre of documentary theatre; Weiss sees the strength of documentary as being 'its ability to shape a useful pattern from fragments of reality' and in so doing 'through the confrontation of contradictory details, it shows up existing conflicts' (quoted in Brandt 1998: 219). From this process participants and audience gain 'an illusion of participation in events' leading to 'attention, consciousness, reflection'.

In contrast to this idea of the audience as participants within the event, Isabelle Zufferey Boulton (2011: 29), discusses the later verbatim play *Gaza Monologues* at the UN headquarters in New York City in 2010 and suggests that documentary theatre, through its form, 'accentuates key moments and creates a distance between the audience and the original event' which, she suggests, makes the audience 'ideal witnesses', who are more emotionally receptive than they would be if they were taking part in the actual event. Boulton and Weiss's theories about documentary may not be as opposed as they first appear: documentary theatre, using actuality as its base, would appear to allow audiences to experience history in a detached and considered manner which in turn calls the audience to witness and to determine a verdict (Paul Woodruff 2008). This links to Cheeseman's desire to present the 'actuality' to an audience, allowing them to make the connections and judgments for themselves, though it also clearly points to a 'shaping' of the material which focuses the audience's attention and consciousness in a specific and predetermined direction.

Weiss does not deny this shaping of material within documentary theatre, stating that 'Documentary Theatre takes sides' (quoted in Brandt 1998: 250). Discussing documentaries dealing with war crimes, he goes on to say that 'no conciliatory traits need to be indicated in the aggressor, while full solidarity must be shown to the underdog' (*ibid*). Cheeseman's documentaries also take the 'side' of the underdog, of the less privileged voice, yet he often allows the 'aggressor' conciliatory traits. Cheeseman thus acknowledges that the 'aggressors' have not committed crimes against humanity, rather they can be seen as committing crimes against some parts of the community of Stoke-on-Trent. By presenting both sides Cheeseman makes a political decision and one which attempts to see and portray the local 'community' as a cohesive whole. The problematic nature of 'community' and the issues which this creates for Cheeseman in the representation of the actuality is picked up and discussed further in the 'understandings of community' section of this chapter.

Cheeseman's documentary theatre moved away from having direct political aims to having a focus on sociological and cultural analysis. Filewod argues that this meant that 'theatre can document the experience of a community'. With this shift 'came increased reliance on factual accuracy' (1987: 17). Cheeseman himself commented similarly in his introduction to *The Knotty* (1970).⁶ Here he states that he believes documentary drama to have been 'an inevitable part of our twentieth-century scientific enthusiasm for a particular relationship with facts, and a

⁶ This is the published script of the documentary drama *The Knotty*, first performed by the Vic company in July 1966, which tells the story of the North Staffordshire railway from its creation to its death. As within the published script of *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, Cheeseman offers detailed notes on the script which explain how the scenes were created from the material. The most relevant and interesting aspect of this script, however, is the detailed introduction by Cheeseman which discusses his definition of documentary theatre and the particular origins of the Stoke documentaries.

kind of intolerance and suspicion of the products of the imagination' (vii). He goes on to say that 'it also seems part of our passion for getting down to the truth, seeing behind the scenes' (vii). For Cheeseman, 'seeing behind the scenes' involves offering the audience an opportunity to look into the 'reality' and 'truth' of a world which they might not otherwise engage with: this includes the worlds of the coal miners' wives in *Nice Girls*, the steel workers in *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and, less obviously but still importantly, the older members of the community and intergenerational relationships.

The literature which I have so far engaged with informs our understanding of why Cheeseman so ardently believed in documentary drama as a means of opening an audience and a community's eyes to their own ability to shape their own reality. In relation to *Nice Girls* and *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, the community was already attempting to shape its own reality through political activity before the production of the documentaries. Cheeseman's documentaries, however, allowed a wider audience to acknowledge their own participation in a shaping of 'reality' and a new formation of a wider, more tolerant and understanding 'community'.

2.3 Theatre-in-the-Round

As noted above, in order to allow the audience to 'see behind the scenes', Cheeseman created the 'Stoke method' of making documentaries. However, it is important to acknowledge that the style of theatre in which the documentaries were presented was also a crucial part of his philosophy. The form of theatrical staging known as theatre-in-the-round, involves the stage being almost or completely surrounded by the audience 'so that if the actor stands in the

middle and turns round he always has as many people behind him as in front of him' (Joseph 1967: 11). Whilst this form of theatre has been thought to free actors, directors and designers from many of the restrictions of proscenium-arch theatre, it clearly has a number of issues of its own: the actor will have their back to a large part of the audience at all times and audibility is therefore often a problem; the set must be minimal in order to avoid problematic sight lines; and scene changes will need to happen in front of the audience. Bearing all of these issues in mind it is important to discover why theatre-in-the-round was accepted as such an important and effective means of theatrical presentation.

Stephen Joseph, original founder of the Vic company and staunch proponent of theatre-in-the-round, valued the style of acting and direction it required and the powerful expression which can be created by the intimacy of this style of theatre. He argued that it engaged its audience and often left the audience 'deeply moved' and 'experience[ing] towards the actors feelings that strongly resemble the sensations of real life' (Joseph 1967: 138). He believed that this form of intimacy was created by the actors through strong communication, which put a 'grave responsibility' onto them and reflected an 'honesty of performance' and a 'quality and significance of plays chosen for representation' (*ibid*). The enforced simplicity of the set and stage, the lack of 'trappings', creates a form of intimate performance in which the audience connect with the performers in a very different way from that of an audience within a proscenium-arch theatre.

In a 1991 interview, Cheeseman and three of his associate directors, Rob Swain, Bob Eaton and Chris Martin, discuss their own experiences of theatre-in-the-round, describing it as

an accessible form of theatre in contrast to the 'confrontational' nature of end-on staging where the audience is separated from the action. Cheeseman believes that theatre-in-the-round has 'that extraordinary flexibility, this sort of fluency, which is to do with the fact that the distinction between actor and audience is slightly blurred' (Cheeseman, *et al* 1991: 15). In this way the power relation between audience member and performer shifts. There are clear political and philosophical reasons for Cheeseman to have chosen to work in-the-round. Cheeseman agrees that his own opinions about theatre-in-the-round have been heavily influenced by those of Joseph who, he suggests, believed that 'theatre-in-the-round represented something that was very important in the human community, a space cleared in the midst of the community. And everybody in the circle has equal access to each other' (Cheeseman, *et al* 1991: 23). For Cheeseman 'there is something profoundly philosophically attractive' about this equality and access as it 'maximizes human dignity, and the audience equally feels like participants in that event' (23). This relationship between performers and audience, audience and production, is an important area which I discuss further in relation to *Nice Girls* and *Fight for Shelton Bar!*

For Cheeseman and his colleague-creators, theatre-in-the-round offers an opportunity to follow a more democratic way of working, freeing them from what David Fennario describes as the 'hierarchical dominance of illusionary theatre' (quoted in Little 2011: 8). Fennario goes on to suggest that documentary and verbatim theatre 'is better served when performed in a non-illusionary style' as the 'fourth wall' dulls the audience's senses and lessens the political and artistic effect (quoted in Little 2011: 8). For Cheeseman, theatre-in-the round also allows

the actors to move around the stage more freely, making their own decisions about blocking⁷ that would not be possible in other forms of theatre. The director is then able to concentrate on the 'essentials' rather than the logistics of how to get from one place to another. It is clear that theatre-in-the-round prevents or at least deeply affects a 'naturalistic' style of theatre. The audience is not observing through a 'fourth wall' where they can distance themselves totally from reality and immerse themselves in the drama. At all times, each audience member can see not only the action on stage but also the audience sitting behind that action and observe their reactions to whatever is taking place. The 'workings' of the theatre are also on display in a far more obvious way. Lighting cannot be disguised behind curtains or flats, 'transformations' and scene changes can only take place during blackout or during intervals, at which time the audience may or may not leave the auditorium. Makeup and other disguising techniques cannot be used to any great extent due to the audience's close proximity to the actors.

For Cheeseman, this transparent and democratic form of presentation was carried into the theatre as a whole. He believed that all areas of the theatre building should receive equal attention and consideration. He states that if you ask 'What is the most efficient way of a building in which all the departments are interdependent and in which everybody can feel equally important and in which everybody can cooperate, you end up in circles' (Cheeseman, *et al* 1991: 23). Theatre-in-the-round, especially in the form of the New Victoria theatre – itself a circular building – seems to offer (in theory at least) a democratic equality both on and off stage

⁷ 'Blocking' refers to the movements which actors make on the stage. These are usually fixed and recorded in the prompt copy of the production.

and incorporating all involved from performers to audience members and back stage employees.

2.4 The History of the Vic

In order to understand how Cheeseman developed his theatrical style and philosophical stand points I now return to the institution of the Vic theatre itself in order to trace how it grew from its meagre origins as the touring 'Studio Theatre Company' based in Scarborough under the direction of Joseph. During the late 1950s and early 60s, the company toured Britain using a new theatre design – theatre-in-the-round – performing primarily new plays by unknown writers who were also part of the company, such as Alan Ayckbourn and David Campton. In 1962 (Joseph having returned to Scarborough), the company with Cheeseman as Artistic Director found its first permanent home in a converted cinema in Stoke-on-Trent, becoming the first permanent theatre-in-the-round in the country.

The company soon outgrew this home and began to look for new housing quite soon after moving into the conversion (Cheeseman wrote the theatre's first new housing brief in 1966); however, it took until 1987 for the New Victoria theatre to be opened, due primarily to municipal indecision about the location of the new building. It would appear that the delay in building a new theatre was in many ways advantageous as it allowed the company to explore what worked and what did not in other buildings (Anderson 1986). Cheeseman and his Vic

company were very involved in the design and build of the New Victoria theatre,⁸ gaining a bursary from the Arts Council for then-theatre designer Alison Chitty to explore venues and theatres and, using her knowledge of the Vic theatre, copy or adapt the best bits from them.

Cheeseman states:

We learned from other theatres. We saw the right floor to ceiling dimensions for our foyers at the Octagon Theatre in Bolton; we were inspired by the lighting grid at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre. Alan Ayckbourn's dressing rooms at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the round in Scarborough were a model of how to make the regional actor's very long day and night more comfortable. The ventilation ducts in the Olivier auditorium at the National make that fine room breathe more naturally and quietly than most theatres do so we followed a similar system. (Cheeseman 1983)

For Cheeseman, the theatre building was of paramount importance. Not only did it need to fulfil the criteria demanded of it as a theatre-in-the-round, it also had to be a pleasant place for the employees and company, which included a respect for the front of house and back stage areas equally. He explains:

I hope that we have made actors exceptionally comfortable and given them real opportunity for rehearsal and study both with their colleagues and in private. We have provided a library as well as several sound proof rooms. We have designed to accommodate the writer and researcher as well as the administrators and assistants. It is obvious that the standards of production at the New Vic will depend on the experience of the creative and administrative staff we are able to attract and retain in our new building. (Cheeseman 1983)

⁸ Anderson (1986) also points out that Stephen Joseph was the founding member of the ABTT (Association of British Theatre Technicians) which perhaps suggests why both he and Cheeseman had such a good understanding of and desire to work with the technical possibilities and restrictions of theatre-in-the-round.

It is clear from the above statement that Cheeseman saw the entire theatre workforce, including the writers, as important members of the team, and he kept a permanent company writer with the theatre as often as finances would allow.

The respect paid to the theatre did not stop within its walls but was also for the grounds in which the theatre was built. The present building is set in what Cheeseman describes as 'A magic garden' (Roger Butler 1991: 11) and much attention was paid to conservation issues within the grounds of the theatre, with the theatre employing a conservation officer until government cutbacks in 1994. Meewezen (1987) commented in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 'If the future theatrical policy is as vigorously pursued as the conservation issue, then the towns of the Staffordshire Potteries will be well served indeed'. However, whilst the New Vic now sat in its own 'magical garden' it was no longer a part of the terraced street it had been connected to at its initial location. Although only half a mile away from its original location, and (almost) at opposite ends of the same road, the theatre was now located in Newcastle-under-Lyme rather than Stoke. The distinction (for many locals) between Stoke and Newcastle is one of working class versus middle class, and in Newcastle owner-occupiers pay considerably more for their properties. The perceived effects on the local community and the performers of this move, are discussed within chapters Five and Six of this thesis.

2.5 Verbatim Theatre - Cheeseman's legacy

Cheeseman continued to make successful and popular documentaries throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s when interest in documentary theatre was on the decline; he did not

create any further documentaries after *Nice Girls* (1993) and retired soon afterwards in 1998. The new millennium, however, brought a resurgence of interest in documentary drama, now often called 'verbatim theatre'. Will Hammond and Dan Steward (2008), define 'verbatim' as a technique, rather than a form, implying that there are many diverse styles of verbatim theatre, which cannot be seen as one coherent 'form'. The 'style' to which Hammond and Steward refer indicates the use of the words of real people, either spoken or drawn from existing records, and used to create the dramatic presentation. For Hammond and Steward verbatim theatre's distinguishing feature is its claim to veracity: its promise of accuracy and truthfulness, and its demanding code of ethics for dramatists. This new wave of documentary drama focuses primarily on current affairs rather than local history, testimony is favoured over printed text, verbatim authenticity is demanded and direct address (speaking directly to the audience) is often used.

Many of these ways of working clearly draw on Cheeseman's documentary style. Writing in *The Guardian* in 2004, Steve Waters talks of theatre as 'rediscovering its public purpose' through a revival of documentary-style theatre. He goes on to say that 'these shows engage dangerously with immediate social realities, compelling the audience to take sides' (Waters 2004). Waters suggests that this resurgence of the 'theatre of fact' is perhaps due to the problematic nature of today's modern life, which defies the invention of the playwright. However, the same may well be said for the 1980s and 90s and yet it took until the late 1990s for verbatim to have its resurgence. The reason may instead lie with the 'distorting mirror' of the media that Cheeseman discussed several decades earlier. Anderson and Wilkinson (2007) point out that mergers and acquisitions within the media world during the late 1990s and

continuing through the 2000s have left people with a lack of faith in the media, creating 'Narrowing points of view and decreasing opportunities for debate and for specific communities to know or own their particular stories' (153). It would seem apparent that documentary and verbatim theatre allow the voices of those who are suffering, or whose voices are not generally heard, to be recognised. Verbatim theatre enables the audience to 'confront actuality' (Waters 2004), it does not offer answers and leaves the audience to work out the 'truth' for themselves. David Hare asks the question:

Given that most art forms, particularly in the hands of metropolitan elites, tend to drift away from reality, what could be more bracing or healthy than occasionally to offer authentic news of overlooked thought and feeling? Isn't it the noblest function of democracy to give a voice to the voiceless? (Hare 2005: 9)

Hare is one of the primary exponents of verbatim theatre in the UK, along with Max Stafford-Clark, Robin Soans, Nick Kent, Richard Norton-Taylor and Alecky Blythe, each having their own working methods. Hare's documentary and verbatim work spans more than thirty years, and he describes himself as an orchestrator and arranger of real-life dialogue. Like Cheeseman, Hare believes that 'good theatre works by reflection and by representation' (Hare 2005: 9) and that documentary drama enables its audience to acknowledge their connection as individuals to the great events of history. For Cheeseman, this connection was important not only in terms of the 'great events of history' but also in order to argue that local events also have a place in history and an importance that may not otherwise have been recognised.

Miranda Barber, director of Six into One Theatre Company, offers an overview of contemporary forms of documentary and verbatim theatre (2005). She discusses the increasing

use of biographical material in theatre, arguing that this has made for a hugely divergent mix of styles. Discussing tribunal theatre, she cites the Tricycle Theatre under the direction of Kent and Norton-Taylor, which takes its material primarily from published transcriptions of official inquiries, as a key proponent. She also cites Hare and Stafford-Clarke, writer and director of *The Permanent Way*, as having developed a different version of verbatim theatre employing improvisations based on their company's transcribed verbatim notes and asking 'how far can an actor go in representing real text on stage?' (Barber 2005: 14). It seems relevant that in answering her question she then goes on to mention the work of Alecky Blythe.

Blythe's work took its inspiration from Mark Wing-Davey, director of the Actors' Centre, and uses the tape-recorded, edited comments of participants played directly into the ear of the actor who repeats the words, live on stage, using the same intonation, cadences and patterns of speech. Blythe believes that the success of this method proves that 'language was the root of character' (Hammond and Steward 2008: 80). This is analogous to the influence that Cheeseman acknowledges he took from radio drama and the recorded voices of 'ordinary people'. He was keen to ensure that the actors rehearsed the lines with the same intonation and speech patterns as the participants, and often played the recordings during rehearsal or, as in *Nice Girls*, had the sources in rehearsal to comment on the performers' delivery.

A further answer to the question 'how far can an actor go in representing real text on stage?' is offered by Forced Entertainment, who can be seen as creating 'experiments in truth' (Barber 2005). Their 2002 production of *The Travels*, commissioned by Künstlerhaus Mousontum (Frankfurt), developed a method which they had begun to use in 1994 on a project

entitled *A Decade of Forced Entertainment*. The projects involved members of the company taking a journey and collecting material from various arbitrary sources, picked at random by the company, in order to build up a picture of a time and space which they then shared with an audience. In this way they aimed to create 'an off-balance mapping that has an eye both for facts of time and place and for ripples of stories and ghosts that are at work in it' (Forced Entertainment 2012). Forced Entertainment's work, described as being 'distorted, intimate and even fictional documentary' (*ibid*), is moving away from the presentation of 'actuality' as Cheeseman presented it, to a creative, 'fictionalised' adaptation of the actuality.

Blythe also finds herself moving more towards inserting fictional sections into her own work (Hammond and Steward 2008: 101) and Hare contends that 'the area that a playwright operates in is always the difference between what people say and what they mean' (Hare 2004). Hare is talking about the tensions caused by the involvement of a dramatist in verbatim theatre. Although he believes he has a moral obligation towards the material and the participants, he does re-write some of the direct reportage in order to make it represent what he believed the participants wanted to say. For Hare, attempting to understand his participants and presenting their words as he understood them is more important than allowing the audience to hear 'direct reportage'. By working in this way, he admits that 'the illusion is that I am not present' (as a writer) but he agrees that this is an illusion and that 'I work like an artist, not like a journalist' (Hare 2004).

This kind of re-writing and 'illusion' would not be permissible within the 'Stoke method' and yet Cheeseman would have agreed with Robin Soans that as a director of verbatim theatre

'The minutiae is terribly important; it's vital to get the meaning clear and to help the actor as much as possible' (Soans 2007). It is perhaps Soans' acknowledgment that he creates 'docu-dramas' rather than documentaries which clarifies the distinction between Cheeseman's documentary work and Soan's work. Like Hare, Cheeseman also believed that his role was to be creative and not to attempt to take the place of the journalist and yet, he seems to have worked in the opposite direction to many of the verbatim creators discussed above. Some of his earlier documentaries (*Jolly Potters* [1964], *Staffordshire Rebels* [1965] and *The Knotty* [1966]) contained improvised sections created by the company, but this method was later discarded. He possibly overcame this need to develop his documentary style by simultaneously producing scripted docu-dramas, written by other dramatists, at the New Vic theatre.

Whilst verbatim theatre has taken from and further developed documentary drama, this section of the review has shown that from ancient Greece to current times, documentary drama has been used to speak to the people, often in didactic style and with a political message. Crossing continents and engaging both the film and theatre world, it has been used to allow the voices of the underprivileged to be heard in their own rich tones. Verbatim drama has used documentary theatre as its base and developed independent styles and techniques. Writing for *The Guardian* website on 8th May 2012, Michael Billington suggests that verbatim now incorporates both process and product and that it 'has proven itself infinitely flexible'. My own research shows how Cheeseman's work in Stoke has been shaped by, and to a large extent shaped both the process and product of this infinitely flexible genre of theatre.

2.6 Community, Ageing and the Life-Course

Having explored the literature surrounding the Vic theatre and documentary drama, and placed Cheeseman's work in context, I now focus on that literature which contributes to a study of the intersection between the Vic documentaries, community, ageing and the life-course.

The Vic and New Vic, under Cheeseman's direction, were not theatres designed specifically to engage with older people, rather the local community as a whole. However, ageing, and the importance of the older generation to a community, were things of which Cheeseman was very aware, believing that his theatre had a responsibility to take the place of 'old men' as preservers and purveyors of community memory. 'Our obligation', he said in an interview in the early 1970s, 'is to show people the past of their community in a way which will give them a sense of their past, in the knowledge that they stand not alone in the present but are part of a historical perspective' (Elvgren 1974: 43). The Vic documentaries also contain material relating to the life-course, and an extensive collection of narrative material – collected from the older generation within the communities which the documentaries relate to – is held in the archive and has been drawn upon within this research.

Moreover, whilst humanities scholars have acknowledged the importance of the arts in the representation of ageing, and the importance of ageing in the arts, gerontologists have begun to discuss the positive effect of an involvement with the arts on older people and how the arts can begin to challenge stereotypes of ageing and old age (for examples of these trends see Jansohn 2004; Worsfold and Krikwood 2005; Small 2007; McMullan 2007; Cohen-Shalev 2008). More than a decade after Anne Basting (1998) pointed out that there was a lack of

literature relating directly to ageing and theatre, this is still the case. The majority of current scholarship around 'ageing and the theatre' relates primarily to theatre companies and performance work created specifically for, or by, older people. Using reminiscence theatre as a back drop, I therefore explore the literature surrounding identity and representations of age and gendered ageing, which relates more closely to documentary drama. Ageing and the life-course are also tied in with the idea of community, both of the micro-community of the theatre and the wider community of Stoke-on-Trent. This thesis focuses precisely on this intersection between the arts and critical gerontology and on the literature which exists within this intersection. I have also explored both gerontological and literary perspectives which may not directly connect theatre and ageing but which constitute a relevant part of this intersection.

This section of the review begins by focusing on the area of community, exploring meanings of 'community' from a number of academic perspectives and in relation to ageing and older age. It moves on to explore literature relating to age, identity and the life-course, looking closely at representations of age in general, drawing on literature relating to a range of different English-speaking countries and relating more specifically to representations of ageing within the theatre. It concludes by examining literature relating to gendered ageing, exploring transitions in the life-course, focusing on retirement, and privileging literature relating to women and ageing.

2.6.1 Understandings of Community

Bernard, Liddle, Bartlam, Scharf and Sim (2012) discuss different forms of community, talking about three key dimensions of community: 'community of place', 'community of interest' and 'community identity'. They suggest that the traditional assumption that 'community of place' means that those living within the same location would have some similar interests and develop a shared identity has been complicated by the inclusion of what has been termed 'elective belonging' (Savage 2008), which takes into account people's individual biographies. They describe how 'communities of interest' have traditionally overlapped with these 'communities of place' as indeed they do within the Vic theatre. It is interesting that Bernard *et al.* cite research conducted by Crow and Allan (1994) into mining communities as an example of this intersection, where emphasis is placed on the 'tight bonds, shared leisure interests and shared meanings' (Bernard *et al* 2012: 108) created within mining communities. The link to *Nice Girls*, and the mining communities which these activist women are fighting for is apparent as is, indeed, the new 'community of identity' which is formed by the creation of the documentary, enabling audience-members, actors and participants to 'identify with a given place, or indeed a given culture' through which 'a shared sense of identity can evolve' (Bernard *et al.* 2012: 108). Crow and Allan (1994) point out that collective action or community spirit are often by-products of the creation of this 'community of identity', which is clearly something which Cheeseman was hoping to create through both *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls*.

Bertotti *et al.* (2011) conclude in their review of conceptualisations of community that individuals can belong to a number of communities at the same time, some embodied and

some imagined. They suggest that this notion raises interesting questions for further research with regard to what happens at this intersection between different communities. Bertotti's study does not discuss community in relation to ageing or older people and for the purposes of this thesis it is the intersections between belonging to different communities, including the shifts in these communities which people make as they age, in which I am interested and to which this thesis contributes.

Phillipson (2007) points out that one view of the consequences of globalisation has been to fragment and distort the 'community of identity' for older people. Community is now thought of as 'unsettled' (Beck 2000) and in Bauman's view (2001) disengaged. Social and work situations which characterised communities are no longer in place. In relation to the research undertaken in this thesis, the demise of the steel works and the coal industry has meant that the social and support networks which went with these industries are no longer reliable. This can be seen as creating a 'disembeddedness' of individuals and families from a stable community existence (Putnam 2000; Charles and Davies 2005). Phillipson offers an alternative view, suggesting that 'globalisation provides an opportunity to re-conceptualise issues relating to community and place in later life, and provides a vital new dimension to current approaches in the expanding field of environmental gerontology' (2007: 323). He discusses studies which explore 'Nostalgia for a past community' (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005) and suggests that ageing research in relation to community is dependent on 'making sense of older people's nostalgia for past imagined communities' (Phillipson 2007: 326).

Coining the term 'imagined communities', Benedict Anderson (1983) suggests that these imagined communities overcome difference in order to draw together as a nation. Whilst this thesis is not concerned with the creation of nationalism, the idea of imagined communities does have affinities with my research. Anderson discusses how imagined communities come about and cites one of the primary sources as print capitalism: the creation of books and newspapers, which enabled people to feel part of a wider community without having direct contact with others within that community. This idea would seem to fit with Cheeseman's creation of the Vic documentary dramas as things that function as an alternative to print capitalism, with some of the same uses; that is, through a creation of an imagined community between documentary participants, performers and audience members.

Pam Schweitzer, who created an important and pioneering link between ageing and documentary theatre during her twenty-three years with Age Exchange Reminiscence Centre and Theatre Company, is very much aware of the need to create communities, imagined or otherwise, in order to share and pass on stories and songs from older people's own cultural and community histories to a younger generation. Schweitzer says that 'from very early I felt that, if Age Exchange were to reflect the views, concerns and life experience of older Londoners, then a significant space must be provided for minority elders whose voices were so rarely heard by the majority' (2007: 17). As well aligning with Cheeseman's desire to allow those members of the community whose voices are often ignored to be heard, Schweitzer's work clearly links with Cheeseman's desire to use documentary theatre to replace the 'old village community', and to tell the stories which are often no longer told by the 'old people' to the 'young people' in such a community (Nevitt 1986: 9).

Whilst a wide-ranging consideration of the connections between audience, theatre and community are not the main focus of this thesis, John McGrath's work with the 7:84 theatre company has some relevance to the thesis. McGrath, playwright, director and founder of 7:84 in Scotland and England took theatre out of its middle-class setting and brought it to audiences who might otherwise never have gone to the theatre. Like Cheeseman he created theatre about the experiences of ordinary working-class men and women which was popular and accessible. McGrath's creation of an ensemble theatre group who worked together for several years also highlights a particular form of 'community' within a theatre company, in a similar way to Cheeseman's permanent company at the Vic theatre. McGrath's (1981) book about theatre theory, *A Good Night Out*, describes the key characteristics of popular or working-class theatre, which are: Directness rather than obscurity, comedy, music, emotion, variety, effect, immediacy, and localism both of material and performers. The idea of localism clearly relates to Cheeseman's desire to create theatre for the community from within that community and demonstrates the wider context in which Cheeseman and his work sits; whilst McGrath's model also provides a set of analytical tools which could be used to further explore Cheeseman's documentaries.

As McGrath took theatre into working men's clubs in order to offer his work to a different audience and create links with local communities, Susan Bennett (1997) acknowledges that the conventional notion of theatre and theatre audiences is of a middle-class occupation but recognises that the rise of theatre companies which 'speak for dominated and generally marginalised peoples and the proliferation of these groups demands new definitions of theatre and recognition of new non-traditional audiences'(1). Bennett provides a further relevant

theoretical model in her 'model of the audience's experience of theatre' (1) which offers a framework based on theatre as a cultural construct as well as the event itself and the audiences experience of this event. It is the 'role of those productive and emancipated audiences' which 'occupies centre-stage throughout these investigations' (2). For Bennett it is the interactive intersection between cultural constructs of theatre and the event itself which form the audience's understanding of theatre. For Cheeseman the creation of the documentaries enabled this 'productive and emancipated' audience to forge links between the communities of Stoke and the community of the theatre.

2.6.2 Age, Ageing Identity and the Life-course

Rowell and Jackson state that in 1965 Cheeseman believed that 'a new kind of theatre had been springing up in Britain, with new aims and ambitions: the community-based repertory theatre with a permanent professional company of actors living in the town and a creative life closely linked to the area it serves' (1984: 151). Cheeseman's artistic policies underlined his belief in the above statement and his desire to create a theatre which worked in this way. Quoting Cheeseman, Rowell and Jackson further argue that he articulated his belief in the need for a theatrical art that 'must spring from our contact with this community' and pinpointed four major conditions that he felt had to be fulfilled to this end:

Actors and actresses must stay together in Stoke as long as possible, so that they get to know one another, the community, and the feelings of the people who come to the theatre.

Writers must work as closely as possible with us so that they get to know us, the theatre and the audience.

I must stay here as long as I am useful to the theatre and the place – an active lifetime if possible – and I certainly plan to;

We must all work together sympathetically and sensitively as a group of artists, ready to respond in a positive way, but as artists, to the needs and demands of the community.

(Rowell and Jackson – quoting Cheeseman 1984: 151)

Within these ‘conditions’ are both explicit and implicit references to ageing and the life-course. Cheeseman talks of his own life-course being bound up with the theatre and his desire that actors and actresses remain a part of the theatre and the community for as much of their life-course as possible, with writers also needing to ‘get to know us’, implying a length of time spent with the company. The documentaries also involved intergenerational exchanges through the process of gathering materials (which often involved young actors interviewing older people), the performances (where young actors played both older people and, at times, younger versions of them), and the ‘passing down’ of the productions through revivals and the evolving theatre archive.

To promote Cheeseman’s conditions for the Victoria theatre, the theatre paid actors on a sliding scale, actors being paid more according to the length of time they had been with the company; thus they were encouraged to stay within the community and to ‘age’ with the theatre. An actor such as Steven Granville, who is a participant in this research, began his career at the Vic as a young man, working alongside a young acting company but, as he stayed with the company for twenty-one years, his life-course and ageing self were bound up with the

company and the theatre. Cheeseman himself, only thirty when the Vic theatre opened its doors, did fulfil his 'condition' to remain with the theatre until his retirement in 1998 after thirty-six years as artistic director. The life-course and ageing of the individuals within the theatre would appear to be a fluid process, interconnected with the theatre's own development and life-course.

To continue this notion of ageing identity within a theatrical community, it is also interesting to consider the difference between a person's *chronological age* and their *contextual age* (Rubin and Rubin 1986). Helen Small describes our 'complex' relationship to our own age as 'multiple, split or layered' and suggests that 'the age we feel is not necessarily the same as our calendrical age, nor is it the same as how we are perceived, or how we register ourselves being perceived by others' (2007: 3). Whilst these areas of age identity can be problematic for anyone, they take on an extra dimension when we consider the 'playing' or 'acting age' which actors have to state on their acting portfolios when applying for parts (actors will state a playing age dependent on their physical appearance rather than their chronological age and thus may be able to play parts within a wide age range).⁹ Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) talk of 'the mask of ageing', referring to the clash between subjective self-identity and the external ageing body which may not be accepted as representative of who the person feels they really are. For an actor, the 'mask of ageing' may be disguised to a certain extent by theatrical techniques (makeup, costume, lighting, etc.) and thus the 'playing age' may remain

⁹ In a recent American court case an actress sued a web site for publishing her chronological age. Her union supported her case, saying 'An actor's actual age is irrelevant to casting. What matters is the age range that an actor can portray' (Child 2013). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2013/apr/12/imdb-age-lawsuit-junie-hoang?INTCMP=SRCH>

well below the chronological age for some actors. However, once the mask can no longer be itself masked, ageing becomes a reality for the individual and for the theatrical community within which that individual exists. An examination of how this perceived mismatch is narrated by ageing participants can give us access to its relevance to the individual ageing experience and thus to ageing more generally.

2.6.3 Representations of Ageing at the Vic and in the Theatre

Whilst actors may have an ability to ‘represent’ characters on stage who may not be the same age as themselves, creating a tension between physical appearance, biological age and socially expected norms of behaviour, the very ‘act’ of performance has been experienced by many as a way to make meaning of their lives through theatrical representation involving music, movement and language. Augusto Boal (1995) suggests that theatre is an act of self-observation through which humans acquire knowledge and study alternative actions. Feldman *et al.* (2011) link this self-observation, through the lens of theatre, to ageing, believing that theatre is an ideal vehicle for highlighting alternative views of ageing as ‘it has been part of the fabric of community life, regardless of culture or context, for hundreds of years’ and so is an ‘accepted’ form of communication, through which alternative views of ageing can be explored. They point out that ‘theatre has been used extensively to communicate ideas, and mirror certain aspects of life in a number of different disciplines’ (886). In a similar way, in *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls*, Cheeseman uses the documentaries to offer the community of Stoke an opportunity to explore the lived and felt experiences of those involved in or affected

by the closure of the steel works and the mines, exploring the intergenerational impact of these events on the families of those involved. The vehicle of the theatre allows an alternative and personal narrative of both ageing and community engagement and upheaval to be heard and engaged with by that community. In a similar way, I have chosen to use the medium of theatre within this thesis as a way to ‘mirror certain aspects of life’ and thus to highlight alternative views of ageing, making it a valid and valuable way to analyse the narratives of my participants.

Like Schweitzer and Cheeseman, Basting believes that theatre is a vehicle for passing historical narratives across generations, stating that ‘Conversations across generations can guide our growth in historical knowledge as well as inform our journeys across the life course’ (1998: 5). For Basting, it is important that theatre involving older adults exists, in order to teach others not only about the past but also about how it is to get old. She acknowledges that the experiences of the old now will not be the same for the old in the future as they are situated in time and are ‘historically constructed perceptions of age’ (5). She goes on to describe eight different theatrical performances, created and performed by older actors in the USA, each with its own unique constructions of meanings of old age. Her research is valuable in showing how young and old negotiate their differences and in considering ‘how the *whole* life course and the relationships between generations are critical if we are to dislodge ourselves from the narrative of decline on which American culture has run aground’ (5; original emphasis). My own research is very much in agreement with this idea of exploring the whole life-course and ‘dislodging’ the decline narrative of old age, which, as Small (2007) points out, is rooted in biomedical models of ageing as an inevitable decline into ill health and death.

The British theatre world seems to have acknowledged the notion of an ageing population and to have realised that there is an ongoing demographic change, with an increasing number of the population reaching retirement and beyond, and a decreasing birth rate (Phillipson 1998), and has recently created a number of productions specifically dealing with this issue. A version of *Romeo and Juliet* entitled *Juliet and her Romeo*, set in an old people's care home and performed at Bristol Old Vic in March 2010, is one example of this, as is Fevered Sleep's performance at the Young Vic in 2010 of *On Ageing*, a play created from interviews and reminiscences collected from people of a number of different ages, with older people prominent amongst them, which focused on the complex experience of getting old, performed by children for adults.

In contrast, Cheeseman and the Vic had to deal with the fact that they had a permanent company for most of their documentaries: the acting company was young in age at its start but, as the company aged, so did its permanent members. Cheeseman did not therefore always have the ability to cast older actors in older parts, nor did he know from the start of the documentary process which age ranges might be required. He dealt with this issue of representation by using an acting style which demanded that the actors were always present within the characters, that they had 'a totally candid and honest basic relationship with the audience' (Cheeseman 1970: xvii), which 'allowed the audience to trace on [the actor] the shape of each character when they could see it so clearly standing out against his own openness' (xviii). Working in a similar way to Brecht, Cheeseman prevented the audience from believing that the actor had 'become' the character, rather encouraging them to be aware that

they were representing the character. In this way the audience could still identify with them without getting lost in the emotion and thus losing the narrative line.

For Cheeseman, representing age on stage was as important as representing a steel worker, a security guard or a political activist. It was crucial that the actors understood the individual, that they had listened to the tapes or had taken part in interviewing, and that they were able to re-present the person accurately. Costume had to be basic and non-specific to character, to allow the actor to play several roles within the documentary; however, characters were given additional elements to their costumes or additional props. For example one participant in this research, Albert Cooper, talked of the trouble which Cheeseman went to in order to get the same pipe for the actor playing Albert that Albert himself always smoked, and how upset Cheeseman was on the first night when the 'real' Albert arrived smoking the 'wrong' pipe.

In this way the documentaries' representations of older people attempt to offer an individual view of each character rather than a stereotyped image of old age, although some of the less individualised characters in other Vic documentaries do become stereotypical to some degree, such as, for example the older women in *The Dirty Hill* (1990).

2.6.4 Representations of Age

Moving outward from theatre and taking a broader look at representations of ageing, Margaret Morganroth Gullette (2011), writing in and about the USA, draws on personal stories,

provocative and under-reported evidence from biomedical research, coverage of Hurricane Katrina, the economic meltdown, and major works of fiction to probe the ageism that creates discontent with our bodies, our accomplishments, and our very selfhood. She talks of the need to fight the 'new ageism' which she sees sweeping through America, an ageism which views ageing and older people as burdens on society, standing in the way of the 'new blood'. Gullette argues that she is not merely trying to replace the cultural decline narrative with a progress narrative, or disowning our fears or the needs and pains of ageing bodies. However, she listens out for 'alternative elegies of later life', trawling the resources of literature, memoir, her own life and those of others to suggest ways in which we can face this together. In a similar way, my own research is a process of 'trawling the resources' of my participants' narratives and presenting them in theatrical form in order to do the same.

Bernard, Chambers and Granville (2000) also emphasise how ageism is fundamental to our understanding of what ageing is like for women in particular, whilst Bytheway and Johnson (1990) state that ageism itself can reinforce a fear of the ageing process. It is possible that Cheeseman was aware, at some level, of the negative way old age and ageism was viewed by society; and it could have been a reason for him to choose to not focus on old age and the older adults in the community within his documentaries even though their narratives were listened to, transcribed and discussed in documentary research committee meetings and held in the archive.

Also working in the USA, Basting discusses how she became disillusioned as a writer of mainly older characters as she was constantly told by other writers and directors that

‘audiences do not want to hear about old age’ (1998: 2) She argues that theatre and performance, for and about older people, are transformative and offer ‘a way to imagine old age as a valuable stage of life; one that links generations, that is engaged in both the present and the past, and that is constantly changing. In this way theatre can begin to question the stereotypes and negative connotations associated with “old age” and aging’ (2). Similarly, in her examination of old age in Western philosophy and older works of literature, Small agrees that ‘neither philosophy nor literature is especially rich in positive responses to age’ (2007: 5), whilst Kathleen Woodward believes that fiction, drama and poetry have, even in recent years, been symptomatic of a culture ‘profoundly ambivalent, and primarily negative, about age’ (Woodward 1991: 5). Writers such as EM Forster, Doris Lessing, Paul Bailey, Kingsley Amis and Muriel Spark have created positive images of ageing in more recent literature, but Woodward and Small’s line of argument still holds true for the majority of literary works; similarly, whilst the works to which Small and Woodward refer are still very much acknowledged and form part of our literary past, they continue to feed the ageism of which Gullette speaks. Anne Basting believes that as the baby boomers head towards retirement there is a growing awareness of the need to re-evaluate the roles and treatment of elderly people in the United States. Her findings challenge those of Small and Woodward to some extent, and she argues that the cultural power of the baby-boomer generation is ‘likely the driving force behind more fully drawn, and increasing numbers of representations of older Americans in film, television, theatre, and advertising’ (1998: 5).

In relation to Australia, Feldman *et al.* (2011) suggest that the concept of ‘ageing well’ is in direct opposition to ageism and the decline narrative. They argue that ‘a key component of

ageing well is having opportunities for meaningful and positive engagement with people, community and institutions' (Feldman *et al.* 2011: 885), and highlight the role which community theatre can play in this process. A play based on Feldman's research, *Wicked Widows*, written by Alan Hopgood (a leading Australian playwright), explores widowhood from the perspective of three widows – composite characters created from Feldman's interviewees. The original research and the play both aimed at improving the health and well being of older people within the Australian regions to which the play toured and to promote 'ageing well via its ability to engage older people and increase their capacity to understand and cope with key life transitions' (Feldman *et al.* 2011: 886).

Being able to present research in a theatrical arena 'offers a non-judgemental environment to talk about what is a family issue', which in turn means that, 'children can hear their widowed mothers talking about this critical life experience' (Feldman and Hopgood 2009). For Feldman and Hopgood, 'It's about these women as individuals, not as an "older person" or their "mother" – but someone with aspirations and dreams for the future'. An alternative view of widowhood is offered, which they see as often misrepresented in the public arena as only a time of depression and negativity, thus reinforcing stereotypes about older women's lives. They create an opportunity for their audience to engage with this major life transition and to acknowledge alternative narratives.

2.6.5 Gendered Ageing

Feldman talks of women passing on their experiences of widowhood to their children in a similar way to how Cheeseman talks of 'old men' passing on their stories to the next generation. I am aware that Cheeseman's documentaries focus primarily on men and male-dominated environments and historical events and chose *Fight for Shelton Bar!* as an example of one of the documentaries drawn from this male-dominated world; in contrast, *Nice Girls* is the odd one out and as such I am taking the opportunity to explore the women's narratives, privileging the literature relating to female ageing.

Socio-demographic changes mean that old age is predominantly a female experience (Cutler 2009). Being male or female is based on biological differences and yet, as Bern (1999) points out, most gender distinctions are socially constructed. Phyllis Moen argues that one way in which gender differentiates people is in the 'social fabric of roles and relationships at different life stages' (2001: 179). She cites marriage as one such occasion, as it offers benefits for both older men and older women, and yet women are less likely to be married as they age due to a longer life expectancy and a lower likelihood of re-marrying after bereavement. Gender continues to affect life-course narratives as individuals' age and face experiences such as retirement; for instance, men are more likely to continue with some paid work whilst women are more likely to take roles such as caring for their spouse or other relatives (Moen 2001). As my research looks at retirement, particularly related to male experiences of retirement from Shelton Bar steel works, it is important to explore some of the literature relating to this phase

of life. However, this section of my review begins with a focus on female ageing as this relates to the narratives of *Nice Girls* and the women who participated in this study.

Whilst Feldman is making an effort to address the negative representation of widowhood in Australia, Woodward (2006) points out that the older woman is largely invisible in academic feminism and the arts. She goes on to say that this is not surprising due to the all-pervading nature of ageism in American culture (162). Gullette points out that in the USA the female body would appear to only be presented as a youthful form in cultural criticism and one that is 'aged' long before the male body (Gullette 2004: 22), at which point it often disappears from cultural reference. In her seminal article 'The Double Standard of Ageing' (1978) Susan Sontag states that in order to overcome the instrument of oppression which is the social convention that ageing enhances a man but progressively destroys a woman, women must 'disobey the convention' (29). A growing number of feminist, critical and narrative gerontologists have striven to challenge the myths around what ageing is like for women. Bernard *et al.* argue, for example, that 'older women are still considered "other" to older men' and suggest that 'approaches which emphasise women's biographies and the need to hear women speak for themselves are going some way towards answering this criticism' (2000: 5). Following Sontag, they show how what Gerike has called 'ageist standards of appearance' (1999: 37) dictate that women are expected to remain youthful in appearance and how women are put under pressure by the media and other cultural references to achieve this state of eternal youth.

Baba Copper (1988) suggests that it is important to dispel traditional ideas about the nuclear family and the expected roles which older women play within this family. The mother cares for her family with no-one caring for her, and this generates ageism. Woodward also talks of the role of the grandmother which she describes as one of the 'horrors' of old age, with the expectations of self-sacrifice which are built into the title. Bernard *et al.* (2000) agree that society's structure and myths about women's roles as carers, mothers and grandmothers, create tensions when thinking about the ageing woman and individual identities.

Until the 2000s the women of the Potteries expectations of self-sacrifice differed slightly from those of most British women as they made up a substantial percentage of the pottery industry workforce. Families tended to be smaller and married women worked longer hours than the majority of women in Britain (Sarsby 1988: 2). In her oral history of women pottery-workers of all ages, Jaqueline Sarsby carried out interviews with past and present pottery workers during the early 1980s. She describes the support which women offered to each other, particularly across generations, with older women helping their daughters to get jobs, the daughters then 'turning up' their wages to their mothers, who then looked after their grandchildren whilst their daughter went out to work. She states that these 'accommodations' were 'as predictable and necessary as other cultural forms in other contexts' (1988: 3). This mutual support amongst women and across generations allowed them to survive in spite of poor wages and poor living conditions; it enabled them to cope with the kind of trauma and loss associated with heavy industry and in turn allowed the pottery industry to continue, without change. My research engages with and adds to Sarsby's findings within the narratives

of participants of *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and also in the life stories of the women activists of *Nice Girls*.

For Judith Butler, these socially accepted norms of behaviour (seen here in Potteries women, across generations) are created through 'acts', as a

performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (Butler 1988: 520)

It is easy to see how Butler's theory can link to alternative views of old age. The ageing woman is trapped within social constructions of gender and age and this issue is relevant to my own research as documentary drama can be seen as one way to offer a 'different sort of repeating' and in so doing help to break that 'stylized repetition' on which ageing might depend. As Basting states:

Performance, in terms of how we perform ourselves in everyday life and in terms of theatrical representation, offers a way to imagine old age as a valuable stage of life; one that links generations, that is engaged in both the present and the past, and that is constantly changing. (Basting 1998: 2)

The use of the 'Stoke method', the documentary acting style and even the link to the earlier mentioned issue of acting age/performance age, can all be seen as possible ways of questioning the social repetition of gender and ageing identity. As Basting points out, moreover, the documentaries offer a way of linking across generations and of imagining old age

as a valuable stage in the life-course. The link between my own use of performativity within this research and Butler's use of this theory, although unrelated in many ways, also seems to create a resonance for my research.

2.6.6 Retirement

Retirement can be seen as part of this 'valuable stage of life'. It is a transition stage within the life-course and one which may be perceived as an 'entry' into old age. The idea of performativity draws together the notion of expectations and 'performance' of retirement as well as those of what it is to be an ageing woman. Retirement is experienced in many different ways within the narratives of the participants in this research and as such it holds different meanings for these individuals, as I discuss within chapters Five and Six.

Moen (2001) describes three stages to retirement: preparation, execution and constructing a postretirement lifestyle. She argues that whilst both men and women may go through the same phases, they can experience them very differently. For the purposes of this thesis it is also important to recognise the issue of 'forced' retirement, which can be either self-imposed (for example, middle-aged actresses who leave acting because there are no good parts for them to play) or imposed by outside pressure (for example the workers at Shelton Bar steel works, some of whom retired because of age and some who were made redundant), and to recognise that 'control over the timing of retirement is important for subsequent well-being' (Moen 2001: 185). Wang (2007), researching retirement in the USA, and Pinquart and Schindler (2007), researching in Germany, support the multiple pathway nature of retirement

adjustment, indicating that the same retirement decision may lead to different adjustment processes in retirees. For the men and women included in my research, there are multiple forms of retirement (for example, retirement from acting but not from paid employment) and many paths to retirement.¹⁰

This thesis accepts, as Elder (1998), Moen and Han (2001) and Moen (2001) suggest, that it is important to look at retirement in terms of the entire life-course because past experiences affect the way in which retirement is perceived and dealt with. Hockey and James argue that the term life-course can be seen as a way of 'envisaging the passage of a lifetime less as the mechanical turning of a wheel and more as the unpredictable flow of a river' (2003: 5). The unpredictable flow of many people's life-courses involves a number of transitions, one of which is retirement. Phillipson (2002: 1) points out that past studies of transitions after fifty have focused on static work-retirement models but that new research shows a 'fluid and rapidly changing context', taking into account the varied options and pathways which people have at this time. Bernard and Phillipson (2004) point out that work-based identities are running alongside, or being substituted by, such activities as volunteering, leisure, caregiving and linked activities. This has led to a decrease in the number of men remaining in work-based employment in their 50s (Phillipson 2002: 2). The social implications of retirement have also shifted. The 'three boxes' of education, work and leisure as described by Best (1980) have unravelled, leaving a question mark over the purpose of the later part of life (Phillipson 1998). Phillipson's 2002 study of transitions from work to retirement argues that the implications of

¹⁰ The Ages and Stages research has also shown that many people enter theatre after retirement, either as volunteers or as members of a theatre group.

complex life transitions need more recognition than they currently receive. My own research explores this area from a number of perspectives, using the subjective experiences of my participants to shed light on the complexity of these transitions.

2.7 Conclusion

This literature review began by taking a narrative approach to the historical and contextual material surrounding the Vic theatre. By exploring the literature surrounding the Vic and New Vic theatres, Cheeseman and documentary drama I offer a framework within which to look at ageing and the life-course as represented through the performed documentaries, the narratives of my participants and the archive. I have placed this research into context and acknowledged both Cheeseman's influences and the impact that his documentaries have on later theatre. The review offers a deeper understanding of the social and political situation from which Cheeseman's policies and eventually the documentaries themselves arose. It addresses the style of performance and performance venue, linking these aspects back to the historical and social context of the theatre.

The second half of the review has outlined the literature surrounding ageing and intergenerational relationships in relation to community, age identity, representation (both theatrical and socially perceived), gender and retirement. It has shown how these issues and the documentaries themselves form an intersection between the arts and critical and social gerontology. Each of these aspects can be considered as alternative lenses which give me a slightly different perspective on my research, as seen in the figure below.

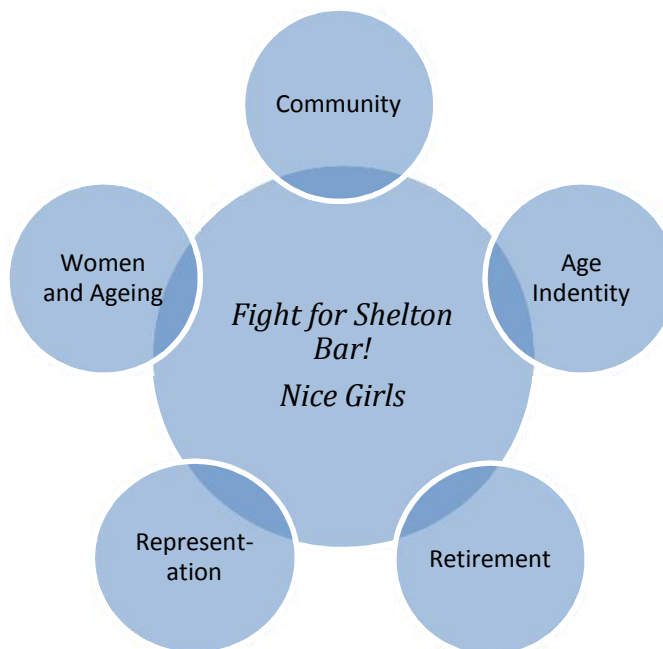


Figure 2.1 – Alternative lenses

In the remainder of this thesis I will explore these alternative lenses and pull them together, with the documentaries as the central interlocking facet.¹¹ By viewing the documentaries through these different lenses I am able not only to see them from these perspectives but also to see how these different facets overlap and fit together within the documentaries, the archive and the contemporary narratives, enabling me to answer the two primary questions posed during the Introduction.

¹¹ In facet methodology (Mason2011), research questions are seen as gemstones which reflect or refract light. Facets are conceived as different methodological-substantive planes and surfaces, which are designed to be capable of casting and refracting light in a variety of ways that help to define the overall object of concern by creating flashes of insight. Facets involve different lines of enquiry, and different ways of seeing.

Chapter Three

Behind the Scenes: Methodology

In Chapter One of this thesis I formulated my research questions and outlined my approach to addressing these questions. The questions were as follows:

- What narratives of the life-course, ageing and intergenerational relations do selected documentaries from Cheeseman's repertoire, namely *Nice Girls* and *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, reveal?
- What kinds of impact did being involved with the Victoria Theatre/New Vic documentaries have on individuals' lives and their engagement with their community'?

I went on, in Chapter Two, to explore the literature relating to these questions and to the broader areas surrounding my research. This chapter looks at the methodological thinking and literature which supports the thesis whilst Chapter Four goes on to describe and discuss its practical creation. Within the present chapter I discuss how I came to make the methodological choices I have made and how these best suit my research questions. I explore the potential of a qualitative approach, influenced by narrative methodologies, for uncovering the subjective experiences attending a person's involvement with the Vic/New Vic theatres across the life-course. I discuss narrative interviewing, including the benefits and pitfalls of insider knowledge, before reviewing the literature relating to Performative Social Science as a methodology and its relationship to 'performativity'.

3.1 Stories Taking Centre Stage

I wanted the narratives of my participants and the literary analyses to guide the direction my research took. My research questions grew through this iterative research process. I have worked in a partly intuitive way, trusting in the process and open to move in whatever direction the research took me. The process has not been a linear or arboreal one, but more of a 'rhizome', as described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), referring to a view of research where multiple points of entry are possible, where everything is interconnected and may lead to unexpected end points. Metzger links this way of working to stories, saying:

Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in stories because there are stories within stories and stories between stories and finding your way through them is as easy and hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is in the getting lost. [For] if you're lost, you really start to look around and listen. (1992: 104)

The circles within the stories which Metzger describes present us with an heuristic device for exploring the circle of the Vic and New Vic theatres and the life-courses of those who were part of this 'circle of life'.

Rather than picking one method in order to answer my research questions, I create a methodological bricolage, as discussed and used by a number of academics (Etherington 2004, Denzin and Lincoln 2005, Holstein and Minkler 2007, Yardley 2008). The researcher is seen here as a weaver of stories, a maker of patchwork, a bricoleur, assembling 'a theoretical montage through which meaning is constructed and conveyed according to a narrative ethic' (Yardley 2008: 1). Speedy (2008: 52) points out that narrative ethics position the writer differently in relation to ethics of care and accountability by going beyond a narrowly 'literal' sense of the

truth to create a multi-layered space in which the 'audience' can imaginatively feel their way into the experiences described. The plays within this thesis are based on verbatim material and 'literal truth' which has been gathered using an ethic of care and accountability; and yet in creating the bricolage of narratives which make up the plays, the importance of attending to a non-linear 'narrative ethic' has also become apparent.

I began this thesis with an understanding that stories were central to the Victoria theatre documentaries as well as to my own understanding of life. I had discovered narrative methodology through the work of counsellor and academic Kim Etherington (2000, 2002, 2004, 2004a, 2005, 2008, 2008a), whilst taking a Diploma in Counselling Psychology. Stories can be used as a way of making sense of life, and they can also help us to make sense of the way we look at the world. I could see how this would be relevant to working with research into ageing and the life-course. It was clear to me that a person is essentially a storytelling animal (MacIntyre 1981) and he or she naturally constructs stories out of life (Josselson 2006). Etherington expands on Sarbin's (1986) theory of living a storied life saying that 'we live storied lives and our world is a storied world' (2004: 75). Epistemologically, narratives become both a way of telling about our lives and a means of knowing (Richardson 2000). Additionally, narrative becomes an ontological condition of life (Somers 1994): we live in worlds shaped by stories and, as Taylor states, we 'grasp our lives in a narrative' (1989: 47). Using a narrative methodology based on the principles and values of understanding human experience as lived and explored stories enables an acknowledgement of links between past and present and thus helps in the sense-making process, especially in relation to ageing and the life-course.

Within this thesis I explore the narratives of my participants through a reflexive lens, and I am aware that my own life-history and narratives need to be taken into account during the research and by the reader of this research, which led to my creation of the autoethnography within the Introduction. As a trained counsellor, I have found that becoming a reflexive researcher has been a natural progression. I have been taught how to think about the cultures and family systems within which my clients live, and I have also been trained to explore how my own culture and family systems impact on my life stories and relationships with others. Whilst this doctoral research does not relate to counselling, I am aware that I draw on these skills as a reflexive researcher and that my ontological and epistemological understanding and values have been fundamentally influenced by my journey into becoming a counsellor as well as the journey I have undertaken within this research.

3.2 Methodological Links to Critical Gerontology

I also recognise the link between the philosophical values and beliefs underpinning critical gerontology and my own position. Phillipson (1998) points out that rather than attempting to objectify and rationalise human experience, critical gerontological approaches encourage us to see ageing as a 'lived experience' that demands dialogue between academics, practitioners and older people. Critical gerontology seeks to counter the shift towards medical and biological approaches to ageing or the 'biomedicalization of aging' (Estes and Binney 1989: 587) which was seen in the 1990s. It seeks to unmask conflicts and contradictions that lie behind ideology and may use the Humanities as one way of exploring self-knowledge, historical

understanding, imaginative communication, and critical appraisal of assumptions and values, which in turn 'can promote a more intellectually rigorous gerontology', heuristically, critically and practically (Cole 1993: viii). Critical gerontologists use cultural studies and history to bring their own viewpoints to gerontology, creating questions with regard to embedded ideological assumptions and contextualising gerontological knowledge. Cole (ibid) argues that philosophy and literature provide 'principles of interpretation' that link empirical findings to social practices. However, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum goes further (1990:3) by giving us another perspective on the narrative ethic's impact on data by asking us to confront the question of how one should write, claiming that, 'Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but it is, itself, a part of content - an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth.' Critical gerontology, then, can be seen as offering 'a critique of ideology and hidden interests, seeking to unmask conflicts and contradictions that lie behind the superficial harmony of ideas' (Moody 1993: xvi), with the aim of questioning ideological assumptions or grand narratives of old age and exploring ways of approaching the individual experience of ageing throughout the life-course.

Weiland (1993: 86) also discusses narrative in relation to literature and critical gerontological aims, saying that narrative can be seen as 'a form of assertion, of maintenance of the self and morale in aging', focusing on the value of individual lives. Like Weiland, Cole believes that literature and narrative can be used to put forward alternative images of ageing as well as social criticism, and Zeillig points out that 'narrative and literary approaches to age and ageing when allied to perspectives from critical gerontology can furnish scholars with important perspectives for interpreting and re-configuring "age"' (2011: 7). She argues that narrative

elucidates stories of ageing and that literary representations significantly assist in this, offering 'important insights to gerontological knowledge' (8). Narrative is seen as overlapping with critical and literary gerontology as they 'all share an ability to confront (rather than shrink) the ambiguities and complexities of age' (9). Bernard *et al.* (2013) have gathered from their 'Ages and Stages' research that 'The theatre is a particularly fruitful context for such investigations since it has historically been a cultural arena in which older people are particularly active participants, as audience members, employees and volunteers'. In this way, narratives and an awareness of representations of ageing through the arts can support and add to a critical gerontological understanding of age and ageing.

Acknowledging the need to manage the 'messy subjectivity' which such approaches to research can create, Holliday (2002: 31) suggests that these approaches expand rather than control narratives, allowing participants to identify the issues which *they* see as important. Older people may not see age-related issues as significant to them and, as Wenger (2003) argues, narrative approaches to research allow the researcher to take a broader life-course perspective which can prevent the researcher from becoming too preoccupied with age when researching older people's lives. Wenger also emphasises the need for the researcher to be aware that one size does not fit all when researching older people; she particularly highlights the broad age range from 45 upwards that may be included in a definition of 'older people'.

Narratives then, are seen by critical gerontologists as a way of exploring ageing in relation to the life-course. The use of literary and theatrical presentation of these narratives has been acknowledged as a way of reconfiguring culturally accepted notions of what it is to 'age'

and to 'be old'. I will now go onto explore narrative inquiry, and how this thesis engages with this area.

3.3 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry can be seen as an umbrella term for a mosaic of research efforts, with varied principles, philosophical assumptions, theoretical musings, methods and/or empirical groundings. All, however, revolve around an interest in narrative as a form of discourse (Smith and Sparkes 2006), based upon collecting, analysing and re-presenting people's stories as told by them (Etherington 2004). Researchers in different fields utilising narrative inquiry hold similar beliefs: that meaning is a basic element of being human and that being human involves actively interpreting meaning. Thus, in order to understand ourselves and others we need to explore the meanings that make up our worlds (Smith and Sparkes 2008). Narrative can support this meaning-making as meaning is created, expressed and organised through narrative and is a storied effort (Bruner 2002).

A further reason for using narrative inquiry is that narratives can throw light on the personal. Stories allow researchers to explore lived experience, by offering information about an individual's internalised world. Whilst they explore the personal, narratives are also social and cultural creations (Reissmann 1993). Narrative inquiry takes account of the place of knowledge and power in relation to individuals and society. It supplements the dominant narratives of ageing discourse as well as those of popular culture, with 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) that shows personal understandings, and ways of living with ageing and change. It is thus well-suited to an exploration of experience within a social and cultural context. The

representation of individual stories thus mediates between the personal and the social. By making narrative inquiry one of my methodological tools of choice I was prepared to explore what my participants' narratives of the life-course, ageing and intergenerational relations revealed, whilst also relating these subjective experiences to the communities within which the participants engaged.

A study of older people and family change by Bornat *et al.* (2000) shows that for many of their participants the opportunity to tell their story became a therapeutic one, enabling them to reflect on past experiences and achieve certain tasks in later life. There is literature from many therapeutic approaches to substantiate the ways in which narrating is not only healing but constitutive of self (Bruner 1990; Freedman and Coombs 1996; McAdams 1993; Neisser and Fivush 1994; White and Epston 1990). Whilst the purpose of the research carried out for this thesis is not a therapeutic one, Bornat points out that reminiscence and life-review do have implications for gerontology, offering 'a rich yield of biographical approaches to understanding old age and the experience of later life' (2002: 121). Bornat discovered in her own research that older participants often found narrative interviews enabled them to 'achieve certain late life tasks relating to issues such as generativity and reflection on past experience' (121). The need to tell their own life stories became an opportunity to gain new meanings and make sense of their current situation in relation to their entire life-course.

McAdams' (1987, 1988, 1990) life-story theory of identity also offers a useful way of understanding ageing in relation to narrative and the individual. He argues that the complex yet coherent narrative that we create of our life experiences is our identity. It is not just how we

express our identity, but is the fundamental way in which we know ourselves and are known by others. As Baddeley and Singer (2007) have also explored, this life-story narrative is created from cultural myths, symbols and expectations which we gain from our community and family as well as from the media, art and literature. Polkinghorne also emphasises the role of narrative in meaning-making, temporality and agency, which he describes as follows: 'Narrative [...] provides a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions. It is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful' (1988: 11).

Many researchers are working with the idea of 'narrative identity' and Singer (2004) suggests that that they share some things in common, including a commitment to study the socio-cultural elements of identity and the use of a life-span developmental perspective, and to better understand how identity develops and changes over the life-course. I attempt to achieve this by having 'an openness to multimethod forms of investigation' (Baddeley and Singer 2007: 178). De Mello acknowledges this multi-method way of researching, seeing all narrative inquiry as arts-based research. For her 'all human work is a work of art' (2007: 207) which can be researched through a methodology which offers a deliberate artistry 'for the sake of aesthetic experience' (Greene 2001: 53), acknowledging art's ability to express rather than to state meaning.

3.4 Narratives from Archives

Whilst contemporary narratives (i.e. those gleaned from interviews), could give me a certain amount of data, I sought to thicken this material with narratives taken from the Victoria theatre archive; these narratives could be used aesthetically within my plays and as part of textual source analyses. The Victoria theatre archive, held at Staffordshire University, contains materials ranging from the 1960s to 1990s, showing the development (and destruction) of local communities as represented through the documentaries. The archive also contains personal narratives, particularly evidenced through the hundreds of hours of taped audio recordings made during the research undertaken for the documentaries, which show more than one iteration of a given community story. Again these move through history from the 1960s to the 1990s. In this way, the archive also offers a way to reflect on the different and shifting meanings of ageing which were created over time. For example, it became possible to use reminiscence through the contemporary narrative interviews I carried out with participants, and to sit this alongside recorded interviews with the same participants made some twenty to forty years previously.

This archive has become a repository for a community's narratives: a collection of stories relating to a specific time and place, stories which appeared in specific iterations of the documentaries. The archive also contains a vast number of personal narratives, as yet untapped, which link individuals' experiences to the communities in which they lived and worked. The material was collected and stored by Cheeseman throughout the history of the Vic and New Victoria Theatres up to 1998.

Morgan-Fleming, Riegle and Fryer (2007: 82) suggest that the use of an archive in studying the past allows the researcher to go beyond the individual narrative, or even the authored story, in order to explore ‘the differentiated particular, helping us to understand the complexities of the past’. It is also important to consider that just as the documentaries created from the archived material can be seen as only one iteration of this material, or ‘one hegemonic tale instead of a symphony of lives’ (Morgan-Fleming *et al.* 2007: 82), so the archive can be seen as one iteration of the history and stories of the community. The archive is shaped by the methods of its own creation or what Derrida (1995: 17) calls ‘archivisation’. The Victoria theatre archive is as yet not formally catalogued or digitised. As such, whilst it is still shaped by its own ‘archivisation’, decisions on what to keep or what not to keep have not (as yet) been made and the archive still manages to retain the impression that it contains undiscovered treasures. This ‘undiscovered’ nature of the archive has allowed me to use it for a number of the purposes which Geiger and Moore (2011) discuss as possible uses for an archive, including a kind of detective work/archaeology (e.g. piecing together the initial bits of narrative which Cheeseman considered using for his documentaries), studying the past, understanding change or continuity over time, understanding context and gaining information not readily available in the present. For the purposes of my research the Victoria theatre archive fulfilled all of these requirements.

Approaching the issue from the perspective of an archivist and historian, Brooks (1969) points out that archival research using handwritten papers and recordings enables the researcher to feel closer to the people who produced the material and that this ‘original’ or ‘primary’ source material forms the basis of much research involving the past. The experience

of sifting through shelves of handwritten material and listening to unedited recordings of interviews relating to the documentaries, allowed me to find this closeness with those who produced the material. I will, however, discuss the possible dangerous illusion present in this feeling of closeness to the past and the mediated nature of the archive, along with a discussion of my own use of the Victoria theatre archive within Chapter Four.

3.5 Narratives from Interviews

There are many ways of carrying out interviews, ranging from structured to unstructured (Bryman 1988; Fontana and Fey 1994; Arksey and Knight 1999), from one-to-one and one-to-two, to group interviews and focus groups (Waterfield 2009). All of these methods have their own benefits and drawbacks but when used within qualitative research they can be seen as having a similar aim: ‘to document and interpret as fully as possible the totality of whatever is being studied in particular contexts from the people’s viewpoint or frame of reference’ (Leininger 1985: 5). The choice of interview style is clearly dependent upon the research questions that drive the methodology, design and methods of a project and therefore the choice of data-collection tools. It is also dependent upon the philosophical standpoint of the researcher. Approaching this research I felt that the relationship between me and my participants should be one of consultancy and collaboration, constantly evaluating the power issues within the research relationships, with a view to greater equality. My aim is to help create a sense of power and autonomy – especially for marginalised groups – by providing a platform from which those voices can be heard. I aim to show transparently *how* I discover

what I know through reflexivity and shared ownership of data with participants. Etherington (2009) suggests that in this way researchers can challenge the assumption that academic 'experts' own the data.

In order to achieve this way of working I discounted a number of formulated models such as Wengraf's biographic narratives and semi-structured interview approach (2001), which seemed to me to objectify contributors, and to lose something of the person in the process. This approach has its value but it was not appropriate for me because I did not want a 'method' which viewed stories as data for analysis. A form of collaborative inquiry was required, underpinned by researcher and participant assumptions of uncertainty and interdependence (a reciprocal process where we educate each other). This form of inquiry would also show an acceptance that there are many ways of knowing, an acknowledgement of complexities of realities and a shift of focus from *only* outcomes to include processes.

I chose to work using narrative research interviewing because this is a dialogical, pragmatic activity where 'Narrator and researcher establish an interpersonal relationship made up of institutional, imaginative, socio-categorical and other communicative frames which are enacted by both partners during the interview' (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 199). I aimed to conduct narrative interviews in which, Mischler (1996) suggests, the interviewees and interviewer move away from the standard protocol of questions and answers to a more discursive experience, where both parties develop narratives and make meanings collaboratively. Holstein and Gubrium (1995), influenced by narrative approaches to interviewing, call this an 'active interview' methodology where interviewee and interviewer

reflect on the meanings of experiences and thus generate new knowledge. In going on to create plays from the narratives developed alongside participants, and encouraging participants to take an active role in shaping these plays, I attempt to continue this 'active interview' process throughout the research analysis, acknowledging my participants as co-researchers and experts in their own stories.

I have described and discussed some of the theoretical choices made with regard to interviewing for this research; how this worked in practice within this research will be further discussed within Chapter Four.

3.6 Insider/Outsider Researcher

A further area I considered in relation to interviews was that of insider/outside researcher. Schutz (1976: 108) states that:

The insider researcher has, as a member of the 'in-group', access to its past and present histories. S/he is a party to the nuances and idioms within their shared language; the hierarchical position of members within the group is clearly defined. 'Recipes' can be used as short cuts to interpret situations and to respond in a fashion seen by the in-group to be a 'matter of course'.

The 'recipes' Schutz talks of relate to the shared knowledge which has been gained by the insider researcher and is acknowledged by the participant. It enables the researcher to respond during the interview in a way that shows a shared understanding of the situation and its context.

Hockey (1993) suggests that there is a further advantage for insider research, namely that there is the possibility of 'enhanced rapport' between participant and insider researcher.

She suggests that participants are more likely to divulge 'intimate details of their lives to someone considered empathetic' (119). In addition, Brooks suggests that an insider perspective is useful within archival research, pointing out that 'to use unpublished sources fruitfully, the investigator, be he professional scholar or casual inquirer, should know their nature and background, their physical characteristics, and the problems that they present' (1969: 1). Although I had no prior 'insider' knowledge of the archive, I was familiar with the context for much of the material stored there and this familiarity did support my exploration of it. However, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 123) point out: 'The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand'. Over-familiarity and taken-for-granted assumptions are clearly areas to be aware of, as well as insider researchers' presumptions that their 'partialness' of knowledge reflects the full picture (Hockey 1993: 119). Robson (2002: 535) similarly warns the insider researcher against 'preconceptions about issues and solutions'. There is, in addition, the parallel problem of the research participants presuming that the insider researcher knows more than he/she does and therefore not sharing certain material.

Whilst an awareness of these issues was with me throughout the interview process, I had no choice but to come from an insider standpoint and this felt beneficial as I was not attempting to achieve objectivity, believing that, as a researcher, I was not a 'disinterested scientific onlooker of the social world' (Schutz 1976: 101). Rather, to pursue qualitative research successfully, I needed to appreciate the experiences of the researched 'as nearly as

possible as its participants live it' (Sherman and Webb 1988). My own privileged insider position is beneficial in part because it enables me to engage in a particular kind of performative social science.

3.7 Performative Social Science

Whilst narrative is at the core of my methodology and forms the basis of my research, I have also drawn on a performative social science (PSS) perspective in order to create the bricolage of interlinked comment and analyses of my participants' narratives. Kip Jones (2006) suggests that PSS creates a synthesis between the arts and social sciences which allows for the dissemination of rich and interpretive biographical research in an interesting and engaging manner. Jones suggests that by using cross-disciplinary methods researchers can present research without imitating 'scientific' reports but by using '(re)presentation that embraces the humanness of social science pursuits' (2006: 67). Mary Gergen and Kenneth Gergen agree that

Traditional forms of representation in the sciences are realist in their rhetoric. They suggest that the discourses in use are reflections (i.e. mirrors) of existing realities. By using performance as one's mode of communication, these assumptions are undermined. The use of theatre, fiction, poetry, or art, for example, suggests their aesthetic nature—that they are created by people and are not 'mirrors of nature.' In this way, performative representations are capable of conveying the sense of truth, but simultaneously undermining its grounds. They are not declarations of what is the case, so much as invitations to 'consider this way of seeing the world.' (2010: 5)

Using performance as a mode of presentation and analysis allows the audience/reader to hear the 'actual' words of the participants but to acknowledge that they have been 'crafted' by an

author who has shaped the way they wish the data to appear. In this way PSS challenges the authority of the academic and the 'truth' of research findings.

Whilst Gergen, Gergen and Jones discuss PSS, it is also important to acknowledge theories of performativity and other meanings of the 'performative' within humanities and social science literature. Judith Butler (1990, 1993), influenced by the work of Husserl, Levi-Strauss, Geertz and Searl amongst others, talks of the 'performativity' of our identities: the exploration of the ways that social reality is not a given but is continually created as an illusion 'through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign' (Butler 1990: 270). In relation to women's studies, Butler talks of gender itself as a cultural performance as opposed to a biological given. In this way, when we take on socially acceptable gender roles, we are enacting them as we have been taught to do. Butler describes these 'performances' as 'gender acts' which can create changes in not only how we perceive ourselves but actually alter our bodily selves. She states: 'One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well' (1990: 272). Thus gender for Butler is not based on biological 'truths' but rather ideology. It is something which exists beyond the individual:

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualised and reproduced as reality once again. (1990: 272)

Butler argues that it is the repeated performance of gender acts in such activities as speech, carriage and mannerism which reinforces the hegemony of gender. Richard Schechner (2002:

22) also talks of performance in relation to its ability to bend and shape the body, as well as marking identities, bending time and telling stories. He defines 'performance' as art, rituals or ordinary life and suggests that they are made up of 'twice behaved behaviors': repeated behaviours that people train to do through practice and rehearsal. He suggests that whilst the work which goes into creating 'art' is clear, everyday life also requires training in order to fit into or adjust to personal and social expectations and circumstances.

Butler's ideas of 'gender acts' are relevant for my research as I consider gender in relation to *Nice Girls*, and Anne Basting's *Stages of Age* (1998) links Butler's ideas and Schechner's 'twice behaved behavior' to ageing, acknowledging ageing as a socially created and 'performed' role. Writing about theatre created by and for older people, Basting draws on Schechner's theories, acknowledging that he creates a distinction between everyday performance and theatrical performance of the self. Basting states that 'performance can be a powerful tool for transforming memories of the past or dreams of the future' (7). She links this to Butler's work on gender, believing that performance has a 'potential for transformation' (8). For Basting, older performers 'take on roles that expand cultural perceptions about what ageing can be, using the transformative power of theatre to disrupt stereotypes of ageing' (8). Basting's comments link to the findings of the Ages and Stages project discussed above as well as to my own discussions of ageing and the theatre within Chapters Five and Six of this thesis.

Jones (2006) points out that when we become performative we offer 'control' of any interpretation to the audience. He believes that this is the most important shift in social science practice created by PSS; at the same time, it offers researchers a chance to be more intuitive,

interpretive and creative in their outputs. The PSS researcher's job becomes one of provoking and stimulating rather than convincing. Zeilig (2011: 10) agrees that narrative approaches which engage with literature and the arts are less concerned with finding definitive explanations and more aware of opening up new definitions of the meaning of ageing, with a 'desire to embrace rather than elide the complexities of later life'. PSS allows the reader/audience to acknowledge the gap between 'what is' and 'what is possible' and 'expands the notion of what constitutes disciplinary knowledge' (Pelias 2005: 417). In presenting my own research in play format I support the view that this approach enables the audience/reader to come to their own conclusions and find their own resonances with the narratives.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter began by reiterating the primary research questions and then went on to discuss how a narrative methodology, using performative social science, was the 'best fit' for answering these questions. The links made by critical gerontology between the social sciences and humanities have enabled me, within this research, to use narrative and performative social science methodologies as an effective way of exploring ageing and the life-course in relation to *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls*. The use of 'performance' and 'performativity' as ways of explaining why individuals behave in socially acceptable/expected ways has also added a further dimension to the use of performance within this thesis and is supported by the concept of 'thick description' as described by Geertz (1973) and Denzin (1989) which

does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (Denzin 1989: 83)

This material collected from participants, the documentaries and the archive, and re-presented within this thesis links the personal to the community within which they live. Having discussed the methodological thinking which lies behind my thesis, I now go onto look at the methods which I have used in the creation of the research, relating the theory to practice.

Chapter Four

The Making of the Thesis

This chapter begins by considering the ethical issues that are an essential part of the process of creating this thesis. It then divides into two parts, the first relating to the process I went through in researching *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and the second to that of *Nice Girls*. Both sections follow the same pattern and begin with a table of the research process. They explore the practical aspects of interviewing participants and using the archive. I show in diagrammatic form what material was used from the archive and discuss how this process was shaped into the final thesis. I complete the chapter by looking at narrative analysis and how this has been used within this thesis.

I was fortunate enough to have some contacts from my past work at the New Victoria theatre and the Ages and Stages team were also helpful in finding contact details of prospective participants, using the theatre's contacts lists and advertising in local press and through the theatre. I created a letter of invitation to be sent out to possible participants containing an information leaflet which gave a brief outline of the research and details of how the interviews would be conducted, with a clear statement that participants had the right to withdraw their participation at any time during the process (see appendix 4.0).

4.1 Ethics

One of the early considerations for this research was the ethical implications of working with participants who may be older than myself and asking them to reminisce about their lives in relation to their involvement with the Vic and New Vic theatres, as well as how they now perceive that involvement. Being trained and working as a person-centred counsellor has given me an awareness of ethical issues, both professionally from Bond and Griffin (2013) and in terms of research (Bond 2014). Thus, I began this doctoral study with an acute awareness of ethical issues which needed to be taken into account before, during and after the research process. I used my values and principles as a counsellor as a basis for my ethical standpoint: believing in authenticity and ‘working at relational depth’ (Mearns and Thorne 2000; Mearns and Cooper 2005). I knew how effective the ‘core conditions’ (Rogers 1961; 1980) of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard could be in the counselling relationship, and I intended to bring these conditions into my research relationships. Initially, I obtained ethical permission for my research from Keele University’s ethics committee (see appendix 4.1).

One aspect of my study which differs from the ‘usual’ approach to qualitative research is my desire to use participants’ real identities. In creating my plays I mirror the work of Cheeseman in his documentaries and thus they are about real people in real situations; it would therefore be very difficult to disguise identity. McLeod (2001: 195) notes, ‘acknowledging the personal dimension of qualitative research, and knowing what to do about it, are two quite different things’. This was the case when I began to think about the impact which my research might have on those mentioned within the stories. An example of this appeared within the first

draft of the play *Performing in the Circle: Rounding up the Ladies for the Company- Beginnings at the Vic*. I had included a section in which Romy Cheeseman, the interviewee, became upset when talking about the Vic theatre and her first experiences there. In the play it seemed to point to a depth of emotion which Romy felt for the Vic and its underlying values and principles. Romy asked for this section to be removed as she felt that her emotion sprang from Cheeseman's ill health at the time of the interview rather than what was implied in the way the scene was put together. Following an ethic of care and accountability I removed this section from the play.

I realised that I needed to be aware of 'narrative ethics' in which the gap between aesthetics and ethics is often crossed (Speedy 2008). By using a creative form of presentation with literary and evocative rather than literal effects I have traversed the blurred borders and (sometimes) liminal spaces between ethics and aesthetics. Here, the creative material moves, to some extent, away from absolute 'fact', and it crosses a gap which some participants may find disturbing. I was aware that participants might therefore want to make alterations. An example of this blurring of borders between ethics and aesthetics can be seen in *Nice Girls Round the Corner: The Beginning* where the stage directions read

A diary is dropped from the lighting grid landing close to Brenda, who protects her nose. Rose moves over to Brenda and inspects her nose. Brenda brushes Rose's hand away and they both laugh. Rose moves over to the diary, which has fallen in front of them, and picks it up.

The dropping of the diary from the lighting grid is clearly a theatrical device rather than a reported event. It was used here to bring the diary into the story and physically onto the stage; to form a bridge between the women's narratives of theatrical representation and the verbatim

account on which the documentary was based. The dropping of the diary was also intended to add humour to Brenda's story, echoing the humour within the original documentary. In adding this theatrical 'device' I am aware that my own play moved away from verbatim authenticity and allowed aesthetic and creative considerations to take precedence, possibly crossing the gap between ethics and aesthetics.

In order to address the issue of anonymity, I created two consent forms (see appendix 4.2) that allowed me to use participants' own words and connect them to their real identities. I did offer participants the option of being anonymised but no-one chose this option. In order to ensure that the participants were comfortable with their own words being used, and with their references to other individuals within their stories, I sent each participant their transcribed interview and asked for any alterations, cuts, additions or corrections which they might like to make. I followed this up by sending them the plays in which they appeared and asking again for comment, cuts, etc. By working in this transparent way, I hoped as Speedy (2008) and Epton and White (1992) suggest, to build a reciprocal relationship between researcher and participant which was based on equality and openness.

4.2 *Fight for Shelton Bar!* Research

I include two tables of the research process, one here for *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and one in the second half of this section for *Nice Girls*. These tables appear linear for ease of reading but my process was not linear; each stage of the process overlapped with the others and they helped to direct each other.

Research Stage	Activity
Ethical approval <i>(Fight for Shelton Bar! and Nice Girls)</i>	Creation of letter of invitation and creation of 'consent form for quotation' from the participants' interviews.
Finding participants <i>(Fight for Shelton Bar! and Nice Girls)</i>	Approached my own contacts from the New Vic theatre, and got a number of contacts from the Ages and Stages project (which advertised through the theatre and through the local press).
Autoethnographic play	During the interview process I wrote my own autoethnographic play which is included in the introduction to this thesis.
Interviews <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	After sending out letters of invitation and speaking to participants I carried out two interviews with Romy Cheeseman and Polly Warren and one interview with both Romy and Peter Cheeseman (carried out by myself and the research associate from Ages and Stages)
Archival research <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	Exploring the archive for material relating to <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>
Writing the first play for <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	The first play, <i>Performing in the Circle - Rounding up the Ladies for the Company</i> , was written from material taken from interviews with two actresses from the original cast plus Peter Cheeseman, and material taken from the archive.
Writing of first source analysis	Deciding on key scenes to analyse from <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i> and writing up what had been missed or included through the versions from original recordings to final published documentary.

Interviews <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	I carried out two further individual interviews with male participants from the original <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i> documentary.
Archival research <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	Continuation of archival searches for scenes which I could trace from their source to finished documentary.
Writing of second play for <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	Creation of play <i>Working Round Here – Stories from Two of the Original Participants of Fight for Shelton Bar!</i> , using material from interviews with two male sources.
Writing of second source analysis	Deciding on key scenes to analyse and writing up what had been missed or included through the versions from original recordings to final published documentary.
Combining an interview and archival exploration	Interview with Chris Martin (a director and actor with the Vic company) carried out by the Ages and Stages team. I used this to link the archived retirement and redundancy stories of the Shelton Bar Steel workers to Chris's life story.
Writing of third play for <i>Fight for Shelton Bar!</i>	Creation of the play <i>The Retirement - Closing the Circle</i> , using the material gained in the stage above.

figure 4.1 – research process table

The table has worked as a personal aide memoire within this thesis as it has enabled me to separate out the different strands of the process which I went through. As the process was rhizomatic in nature, as discussed in the introduction, it was not until I sat down to create these tables that I clarified the different stages in the process which then aided in making connections between the different layers of research.

4.3 Conducting Interviews

When I began my research, I immediately wanted to hear the stories of those who had been involved in the Victoria theatre and its documentaries, starting with Peter Cheeseman. It was very hard to have to acknowledge that Cheeseman might not still be alive when I completed this research as he was suffering from the later stages of Parkinson's Disease; however, it was crucial that his narrative form a central part of this research, just as he had been central to the Victoria theatre and the documentaries. Peter very sadly died in 2010, shortly after I had begun my research. Fortunately, I did have the chance to speak to him about my research and, alongside the Ages and Stages research associate, Michelle Rickett, I conducted an extended interview/discussion with him and his wife Romy in January 2010.

Romy supported him throughout the discussion and translated much of what he said at the interview, but transcribing the session became nearly impossible due to his problems with speech and occasional lapses in concentration. It was clear that he was not going to be able to give me his first-hand narrative and so I explored other ways of listening to his stories and turned to a large amount of literature, including historical interviews with him, drawing on both published and unpublished material taken from the archive, which allowed his voice to be heard more readily. I have incorporated these stories into my research, in both the literature review and the plays. It also came as no surprise that all of my participants spoke of Cheeseman as a key figure within their own narratives of the Victoria theatre and the documentaries, and thus his story, given through his own narratives, the theatre policy and the narratives of my participants, has taken centre stage throughout this thesis.

In order to hear the stories of my participants I intended to carry out narrative interviews, agreeing with Miller and Glassner (1997) that those who want to discover meaning related to perceptions and experiences, choose to interview. I saw these interviews as conversations with a purpose (Kahn & Cannell 1957) and as an interactive process where meaning could be constructed (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, Denzin 2001). These interviews were unstructured though all participants were given a general sense of the area I was looking at prior to interview (see Appendix 4.1). Interviewees were given a choice of where this should take place and most chose to be interviewed in their own homes in order to make the process as easy and comfortable as possible.

I informed participants that the interviews would run for approximately one hour, which most did. The discussion with Peter and Romy Cheeseman ran to almost three hours, partly due to communication issues, but primarily because Peter Cheeseman wanted to ask a number of questions about the research and the bigger Ages and Stages project and also wanted to show his home archive of pictures and material related to the theatre.

4.4 Interviews: *Fight for Shelton Bar!*

I went on to conduct a further narrative interview with Romy Cheeseman who had acted in *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, as well as one with another actor from the documentary, Polly Warren, and two of the original documentary sources, Ken Smith and Albert Cooper, retired former employees of Shelton Bar steel works. All interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, other than the one with Polly which took place at the Cheesemans' house when she was visiting them from her current home, some distance away. This is a further difference

between my own work and the general Ages and Stages project – the latter drew only on people who had stayed in the local area. In contrast with the interview with Peter Cheeseman, these interviews were held on a one-to-one basis. Interviews were recorded on an Olympus digital voice recorder which I could download onto my computer for ease of transcription and were then password protected.

As I had begun the research with actresses who had performed in *Fight to Shelton Bar!*, I decided to continue with this documentary before moving on to *Nice Girls*. This made sense not only pragmatically but also historically as *Fight for Shelton Bar!* was the earlier of the two documentaries. This enabled me to experience the shift from *Fight for Shelton Bar!* to *Nice Girls* in terms of my participants' narratives and my literary analyses, and also in terms of the development of the life-course of the theatre and community.

As soon as I had completed an interview I made brief handwritten field notes about any thoughts which came immediately to mind especially in relation to themes/areas of interest which might have appeared to run through the interview, or which ran across the interviews. When interviews were carried out with a second researcher present (for example the interview with Cheeseman), I discussed my thoughts with my fellow researcher and compared notes. I then listened back to the interviews in order to ensure that I had picked up on all relevant areas, before transcribing the interviews myself. The majority averaged around 15,000 words. I made notes, using 'comments' in Microsoft Word, as I transcribed with regard to themes and areas relating to the Vic, ageing, the life-course and intergenerational relationships, and links with the community. I use the word 'themes' but was in fact looking for connections that

resonated for me and appeared to be repeated within and across the participant's stories. As I discovered these connections (for example: comments relating to the impact or perceived impact of age on the participant, stories which looked across the life-course of the participant and stories which linked the participant's life-course and ageing to the Vic and the documentaries), I highlighted them in different colours within the transcript. Once the transcription was complete I sent it back to the participant, asking them to check it for errors and to make any comments and suggest any alterations or omissions. (I have discussed any significant alterations made by participants within the 'analysis of narrative' sections of this thesis.)

Once the transcript was returned I re-read it, searching once more for narratives connecting the individual to my research questions and adding to the highlighted connections previously found. I then brought together the highlighted sections from various participants' narratives in order to make connections across the narratives. This led me to write my first play using the two actresses and Cheeseman as their narrative connections resonated with one another, as did the narratives from the two retired employees around which I created the second play in this chapter of the thesis.

The process of writing the plays was a creative one in which I used sections from the narrative interviews as dialogue and created aesthetically interesting ways of delivering these narratives in relation to each other. My use of stage directions was an integral and important part of the process as this supported the 'narrative analysis' which went into the creation of the plays, helping to highlight emotional issues and link or contrast participants' narratives. The

third play I created came from a slightly different process. The interview with Chris Martin, an actor and director who had worked at the Vic from its very early days up until Cheeseman's retirement, was carried and transcribed by the Ages and Stages team (collected using an unstructured interview technique over a similar length of time). I had spoken to Chris previously and had worked with him at the New Vic during my time there, but was not able to attend this interview. I listened to the interview and, when I read the transcription, I could hear Chris's voice in my head. The fact that I was not present at this interview was possibly positive in terms of gaining useful material. Being an 'insider' researcher has its advantages, as I discussed earlier, but in this case the absence of an insider researcher allowed Chris to 'perform' his stories for a new audience, enabling him to re-present his narratives without the same 'checking of self' which may have taken place had I been present with my insider knowledge.

I carried out the same process with Chris's interview transcript as I had done with my other participants. I had found a number of narratives in the archive relating to retired workers from Shelton Bar Steel works (most of which had not been included in the final documentary) and Chris's narrative resonated with these stories as he had just reached retirement. I decided to juxtapose Chris's story with these archival narratives having transcribed sections taken from the original taped recordings. The play was sent to Chris for comment and altered; alterations are discussed within the analysis of narrative sections of Chapter Five.

Through my own creation of documentary dramas I explore how the testimonies of local people could be transformed into theatrical narratives. In choosing to use similar rules to

Cheeseman for my own 'plays', my aim was to uncover some of the working issues which Cheeseman and his team may well have encountered. I call them 'plays' rather than documentaries because I feel that they have too much authorial direction (or, as Cheeseman might have called it, 'Basten soup'), to be true documentaries: I have chosen the participants, I have looked for specific areas and themes within their interviews, and I have put the material into play form. I have attempted to ensure that the contents of the plays are relevant and 'truthful' for my participants by ensuring that they read the play and had the opportunity to make alterations to it in order to stay as close to the original intentions of my participants as possible.

The lines of the 'characters' are presented in stanzaic form for the most part, as this captures the rhythm and poetic quality of the spoken word, allowing the reader to appreciate narrative structure, meaning and emotional impact (Mishler 1991; Richardson 2003) and to honour the speaker's pauses, repetitions, silences, alliterations and breath points (Gee 1991). The transcriptions from which the plays were created were also taken as spoken, leaving in pauses, accent and dialect. Through these techniques, the reader/audience is brought closer to the lived experience of the speakers' stories. I have also taken the use of stanzaic form from Brecht, and this seems appropriate because Brecht's influence on Cheeseman and documentary drama is highly visible in its acting style and presentation. However, whilst acknowledge the Brechtian influences on this play, it is important to note that the main influence on this play is Cheeseman's documentary style (the Stoke method).

4.5 Using the Vic Archive: *Fight for Shelton Bar!*

Whilst the narratives of my participants were to be my starting point, they were not the only narratives that I explored. Realising that I could not gain a full story of the Vic documentaries from contemporary interviews I looked at the archive as a repository for a community's narratives: this was a collection of material which would allow me to explore the life-course of the documentaries. It became possible to use reminiscence through the contemporary narrative interviews I carried out with participants, and to sit this alongside recorded interviews with the same participants made some twenty to forty years previously.

I conducted interviews whilst, at the same time, exploring the sections of the archive relating to *Fight for Shelton Bar!* In this way, stories from the past and present could become interlinked far more easily within my mind and my research. The Victoria theatre archive has a 'map' (see Appendix 4.3) and though it has fallen into its own system which is thoroughly consistent, it still appears 'undiscovered' in nature, as I discussed above. Whilst this was positive in preventing the archive from being too prescribed or shaped, it did cause practical issues and problems. Many of the audio recordings were not digitised and could only be accessed in their original reel-to-reel tape recordings, which were not only difficult to set up and play, but were also very delicate and easily damaged (plus being of relatively poor quality due to their age). The archive, with all of its positive and problematic qualities, plays a major part in my research, and I have drawn a great deal of the material from it. In the following diagram I show what material was used from the archive. The arrows represent the interlinked nature of the archive and the rhizomatic nature of my research.

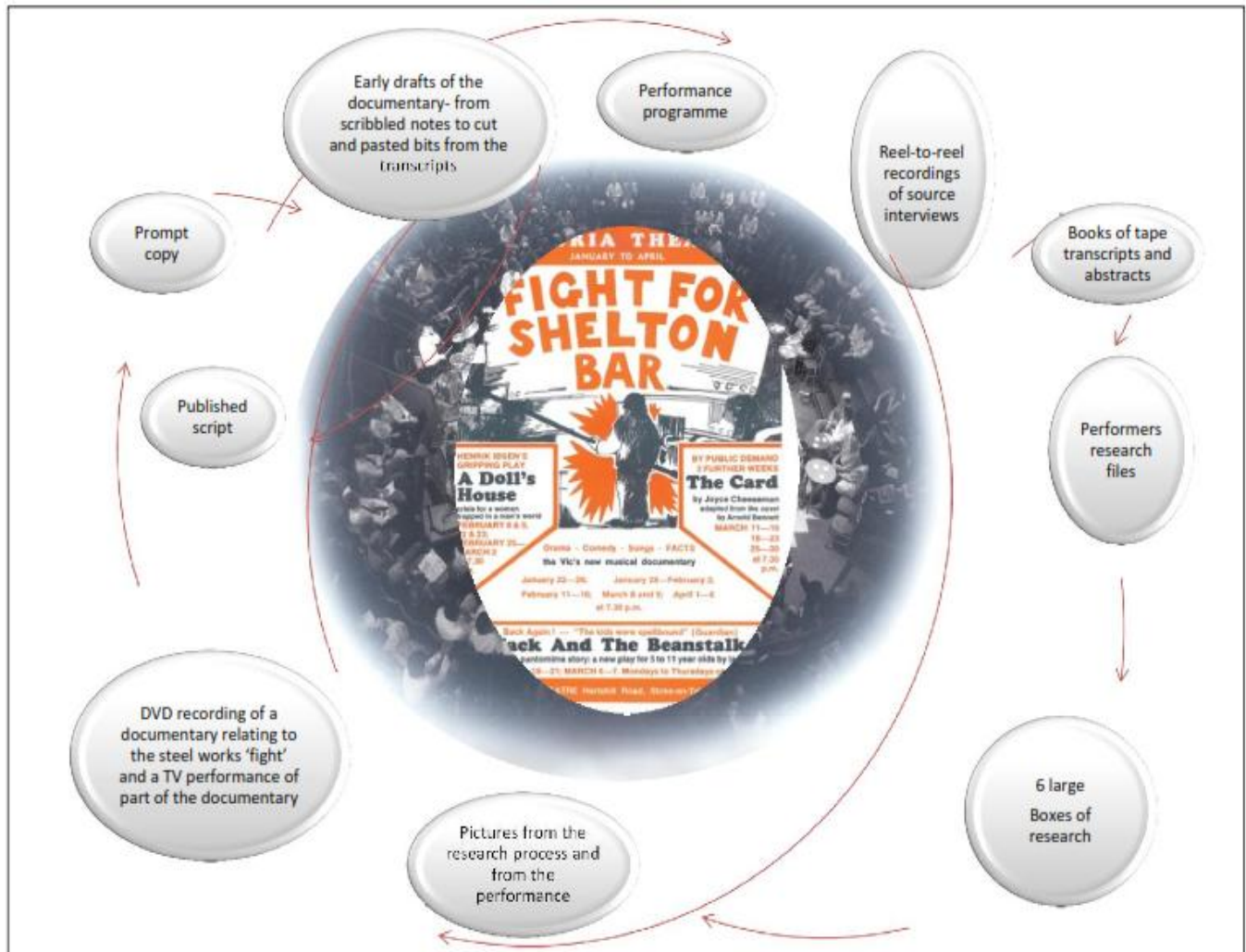


Figure 4.2 – Archival material *Fight for Shelton Bar!*

My starting point was the finished script of *Fight for Shelton Bar!* As this was one of only two published scripts of the documentaries I was able to read it as a 'polished' production. I was also able to watch parts of the documentary which had been recorded for Donnellan's BBC TV documentary (1974) about the Shelton Bar industrial dispute. Having explored the final

iteration of the documentary, I began to trace how it was created, exploring what was included and what was omitted.

The research files given to the actors by Cheeseman offer me an introduction to the vast amount of data collected by the research committee who created the documentary. These files contain what Cheeseman and the research committee considered the most important pieces of research, from newspaper cuttings, historical records and pictures to transcripts of certain scenes. The research files also contain information for the actors about how the documentary would be put together during rehearsal, highlighting Cheeseman's working practices. These became points of discussion within the interviews: most of the actors I interviewed talked about how the documentaries were created and how Cheeseman guided and structured this process. Thus, the archive and the contemporary interviews began to inform one another; the research was building on past narratives to create new meanings.

From this, I moved on to look at the 'tape transcripts' files which gave all of the abstracted and some fully transcribed interviews which were carried out during the original research process. After looking at the abstracted sections within the transcriptions, I then listened to the original tapes of these interviews and made notes or, sometimes, fully transcribed sections that seemed appropriate. I particularly wanted to explore stories which were not present within the finished documentary but which were clearly visible within the transcription files. This archival material began to shape the creation of the source analysis sections of the thesis as well as feeding into some of my plays.

It is clear that the Victoria theatre archive has been shaped and will continue to be shaped by social, political and technological forces (Manoff 2004) and, as Derrida's (1995) work highlights, there is a contingent nature to the archive. Cheeseman put a great deal of effort into finding a home for the archive and attempting to gain funding for it, and Romy Cheeseman (as honorary archivist since Cheeseman's death) is continuing to raise funds to employ a full-time archivist to work on the collection. However, as it becomes digitised and access becomes more controlled, this will re-shape the archive and ultimately add new shapes to the narratives contained within it.

4.6 *Nice Girls* Research

The process of creating the *Nice Girls* documentary differed significantly from that of *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, as I discuss in detail in the introduction to Chapter Six. In a similar way, I found that my own research processes had shifted slightly and a somewhat different pattern for this chapter emerged. The play was written as one piece rather than as separate scenes and the archival research was also conducted as a single block.

Research stage	Activity
Interviews	Interview with Steve Granville – the only male actor in <i>Nice Girls</i> and a long-time actor at the theatre.
Archival research	Exploring the archive for material relating to key scenes in <i>Nice Girls</i> .

Interviews	Interview with two female sources for <i>Nice Girls</i> carried out at the home of one of the women in Stoke-on-Trent.
Archival research	Exploring the archive for further material relating to key scenes in <i>Nice Girls</i> .
Interviews	Interview with two actresses who played roles in the first production of <i>Nice Girls</i> , conducted in the home of one of the actresses in London.
Writing of the three scenes of the play <i>Nice Girls round the Corner</i>.	This play was created from the narratives of the two original women documentary participants, the male actor and the two actresses. It focuses on the early, middle and final parts of their time at the Vic and of their life-courses to date.

Figure 4.3 Research process table 2

I had seen the original production of *Nice Girls* at the New Vic theatre in 1993 and had worked in stage management at the theatre during its creation, meaning that I felt more of an insider researcher in relation to this production than I felt with *Fight for Shelton Bar!* I was also closer in age to those I interviewed and, whilst I do not think that this affected my way of viewing the participants, I do think it had an impact on the way the participants viewed me when I was working on *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, as they saw me as too young to remember

Shelton Bar in its heyday. This issue is discussed in relation to one of the male participants of *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, within Chapter Five.

4.7 Interviews: *Nice Girls*

Most of the interviews relating to *Fight for Shelton Bar!* were conducted on a one-to-one basis whilst those relating to *Nice Girls* were conducted with myself and two pairs of participants. The first interview I carried out with Steve Granville, the only male actor to take part in the *Nice Girls* documentary, was the exception to this as he was on his own but I worked alongside the researcher from Ages and Stages. This interview was conducted at the participant's home in Stoke. I also interviewed two women (Brenda Proctor and Rose Hunter), who were sources for the original documentary, in one of their homes in Stoke. Interviewing them as a pair was in part a pragmatic decision but one that was encouraged by the women. Once I had decided to interview them together, I felt that I wanted to mirror this situation when interviewing the actresses (Charlotte Barker and Alice Arnold) who had played two of the women activists. In this way I was able to view the two sets of interviews on an equal level and be aware of how the interaction between the women impacted upon the interview. My aim was also to reflect the original *Nice Girls* documentary process: during the documentary process Cheeseman had interviewed the women participants in groups and my aim was to reflect and build upon this process by interviewing two of the same participants, nearly twenty years later and then adding a further layer to these narratives by interviewing the actresses who represented the women on stage.

The fact that I had worked at the New Vic allowed my participants to acknowledge me, to some extent, as an ‘insider’, which also enabled them to speak more freely and to not feel the need to ‘explain’ their stories. Since the insider researcher shares the social world of the research participants there was less likelihood of me experiencing any ‘culture shock or disorientation’ (Hockey 1993: 119). It was very useful in this respect to be working in parallel with the Ages and Stages team, who were coming from an ‘outsider’ position and whose analysis of their own interview material was available for me to look at and discuss, allowing me to see where my own ‘insider’ standpoint might affect the analysis of my material.

Having interviewed my participants, I began to put together a play, *Nice Girls Round the Corner*, which I later broke down into three scenes: ‘the beginning’, ‘the middle’ and ‘the end’. The idea was to follow the life-course of the participants in relation to their links with the theatre and the community of Stoke-on-Trent. I chose to juxtapose these life-course narratives with key scenes from the original documentary which occurred at the beginning and the end of the production.

4.8 Using the Vic Archive: *Nice Girls*

Having completed most of the research for *Fight for Shelton Bar!* I had become familiar with the archive and so the exploration part of the research process for *Nice Girls* was more organised. I was aware of the location of the material relating to the documentary and knew what kind of information would have been archived by Cheeseman and the company. Again I include a diagram showing the material I explored from the archive:



Figure 4.4 Archival Material *Nice Girls*

Finding and listening to the original taped interviews made by the company was also a slightly easier task as technology had developed in the period between the two productions, and they were now stored in audio tape format rather than reel-to-reel, making it easier to listen to those tapes that have not, as yet, been digitised. I was also able to watch a filmed version of the

original production which has been archived by the National Video Archive of Performance at The Victoria and Albert Museum. Unlike *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, *Nice Girls* has not been published and thus, my initial recourse to a written version of the production was through the prompt copies stored in the archive.¹² From this final iteration of the stories gathered by Cheeseman's original research team I moved on to look at where the narratives had originally come from and found that, unlike *Fight for Shelton Bar!* where the research material had come from a vast array of participants, most of the research data used by Cheeseman for *Nice Girls* had come from just four women participants. They had created a handwritten composite diary whilst carrying out an occupation of Trentham Colliery, and they had also been interviewed as a group and taken through the narrative of their occupation of the pit head, step by step, by Cheeseman. I explored the original transcripts of these interviews and discovered (through the archive and through the contemporary interviews) that the women had also been very present in the rehearsal room and had confirmed and added detail to their stories as the rehearsals had progressed.

I pieced together the source analysis, choosing two key scenes from the documentary and exploring these in detail, returning to the sections of the group interviews which related to this part of the participants' narratives, looking for omissions and inclusions which related to my research area. I also discovered a series of biographical interviews carried out with each participant from which I drew the data relating to my second source analysis. The plays and the

¹² Prompt copies are the final script from which the stage manager works when prompting the performers during the performance and in which all movements (blocking) of the actors are recorded along with the lighting, sound and audio visual requirements. This prompt copy is used to recreate the production for future performances.

source analyses for both *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls* are in themselves ‘analyses’ of the research material and I will now go on to discuss the theoretical background to my use of these forms of analysis.

4.9 Narrative Analysis

Analysis, a process of making meaning, occurs, as Reimann (2003) argues, throughout the research process rather than being a separate activity carried out after data collection. While being involved in, listening to/reading the conversations, researchers take in what is being said and compare it with their personal understandings, without filling in any gaps in understanding with ‘grand narratives’, or but rather inquiring about how pieces of the stories make sense together.

I offer the reader a series of ‘plays’ in which I have chosen and placed aspects of my archival research as well as sections taken from interviews. In this way I have already begun the process of ‘analysis of narrative’ by choosing which sections of the interviews to juxtapose; however, I am presenting the whole as a story which I have created and thus I am offering a ‘narrative analysis’ (Polkinghorne 1995).

Smith and Sparkes point out that when people tell stories they also bring in their own analytical techniques in order to interpret their worlds and thus ‘whereas story analysts tell a story, storytellers show it and, in turn, a theory: the story is a theory’ (2008: 21). Whilst I agree that each participant has already filtered their stories through their own theories of self, I also

acknowledge that for the purposes of this research (and for the ‘audience’ for which I am writing), I offer my own interpretations of the narratives alongside those of my participants, in order to make connections and contrasts within and across their stories. I have combined the role of storyteller and story analyst, conducting an analysis of narrative in which the stories are perceived as data which is analysed in a systematic way. Smith and Sparkes suggest that this involves the researcher stepping outside of the story and presenting their findings with ‘interpretive omnipotence’ (2008: 21). This is a problematic concept for me, as it was for Cheeseman, though I am aware that I have used this form of analysis within this research. I reconcile the issue by acknowledging that the stories which I tell here (through my participants’ narratives and the analysis of narrative sections following the plays) are ‘my story’. I am telling what I see and offering this as *one* version rather than *the* version; showing that ‘truth’ is not fixed but dependent upon many factors including the audience. By presenting my work in this way I am also mirroring the process undergone by the Vic research teams within the documentaries. The finished documentaries offer one iteration of the material which can be found within the archive and from which the documentary was created. These [finished] productions become one version of the truth.

This thesis follows Coffey and Atkinson’s (1996) suggestion that qualitative researchers should consider using a variety of analytical techniques in order to understand their research material in different ways. Analytical diversity is useful, they argue, because researchers ‘can use different analytic strategies in order to explore different facets of our data, explore different kinds of order in them, and construct different versions of the social world’ (14). Coffey and Atkinson suggest that different kinds of analysis offer alternative lenses through

which to explore the research and, in so doing, will show that there is more than one version of the ‘truth’ to be found within it. The research bricolage within this thesis allows the embedded texts – the autoethnographic play, the plays in the *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls* chapters and the source analyses – to challenge, inform and enhance the thesis.

4.10 Conclusion

Within this chapter I have described how I have used my methodological choices in practice. I have discussed narrative analysis and how this has supported me in working alongside my participants rather than taking a position of ‘interpretive omnipotence’ (Smith and Sparkes 2008: 21). Working iteratively and using reflexivity has enabled me to take the shifts and turns of the research process and embed the changes within the thesis. Reflexivity and a desire to consider the participants throughout the research process has meant that I have had to shift some of my initial expectations and use the literature more as a guide than a prescribed method. I have begun to discuss these issues within this chapter but I am aware that narrative and performative methodological thinking is not simply confined to this chapter: it infects the entire thesis and as such it is an issue underlying the following chapters.

Chapter Five

Fight for Shelton Bar!: Family and Community

5.1 Setting the Scene

In this chapter I conduct thematic analyses of the narratives of my participants by creating dramatic scripts based verbatim on their transcribed interviews, followed by critical commentary on these plays and the narratives within them. These analyses show how *Fight for Shelton Bar!* enables this thesis to understand the impact of the Vic theatre on different dimensions of the participants' life as they age. The dramatic texts (discussed here as plays), and commentary are interspersed with textual analyses of the archival material on which *Fight for Shelton Bar!* is based, exploring key scenes for particular aspects of this material (for example the omission of emotive and age-inflected testimony) in order to look at how the material came together, and variances between the preserved script and other iterations of the material preserved in the archive.

The chapter begins with the play *Performing in the Circle: Rounding up the Ladies for the Company* created from verbatim interview material from Romy Saunders (later to become Romy Cheeseman), Polly Warren and Peter Cheeseman (the sources for Cheeseman's narratives are offered in the footnotes). This section takes us through the process of making the documentary and looks at the life-courses of Romy and Polly in relation to the Vic theatre in order to understand the shifting relationship which these participants have had with the

theatre throughout their life-course. It explores the relationships formed between the theatre and the local community and Cheeseman's desire to create both a community within the theatre and one linked to the local community of Stoke. In the critical commentary which follows the play I explore meanings associated with these narratives including the problematic nature of memory and narrative truth. I address the themes of beginnings at the Vic, community; linking the documentary and the theatre to the local community and the continued impact of the documentary on the performers' life-courses. The choice of Polly and Romy's narratives within this first play was a conscious decision, taken to offset the dominance of male perspectives within the documentary and to foreground women's roles. Polly's presence within the plays, the commentary and the archive based textual analyses also become a thread which links the entire chapter.

The chapter continues with a textual analysis of the source material relating to 'Mill Meeting' (Cheeseman 1977: 38-40), a key scene from *Fight for Shelton Bar!* This explores the intergenerational impact of the closing of Shelton Bar and the age-related issues connected with it as well as the omission of much of the material relating to personal emotions (which often relate to later life) and confrontation/tension within the community of Shelton Bar. A further play follows, 'Working round here: Stories from two of the original sources of *Fight for Shelton Bar!*' created from the narratives of two of the Shelton Bar steel workers (now retired), establishing themes of place and community as well as family relationship and the life-courses of these two men in relation to both the steel works and to the Vic theatre. The chapter moves on to a textual analysis of the 'Kaldo Sequence' (Cheeseman 1977: 24-25) and 'Concast

Sequence'(Cheeseman 1977: 29-32), scenes explored here under the thesis sub-heading of 'process'. Cheeseman states in the notes to these scenes that:

Very early on, even before the documentary opened, we had to cut two songs written by retired steelmen about Shelton's past, and also a lot of material about the social and domestic impact of the situation, all of which had ended up at this point in the order of events. Some of the social material is left in the Kaldo and Concast sequences, particularly the speeches by the wives. But the main fact was that there was a limit to the length of the show (which ran from 7.30 till just before 10.30 with a 15 minute interval). To do full justice to the complexity of the fight itself it took that long.

(1977: 55)

This textual source analysis explores the omissions from the scenes focusing precisely on the 'social and domestic impact of the situation'. It continues to expand the family theme by exploring the archived narratives of steel workers and their wives, material which illuminates the intergenerational impact of the closing of the steel works. The chapter concludes with a play taken from the narratives of Chris Martin, as well as original source material from the archive of interviews with older steel workers and their families. The section highlights the effect of transitions within the life-course and focuses on retirement.

Each of the phases of this chapter add to my thesis that *Fight for Shelton Bar!* links the theatre to family, generational issues, retirement and community. The 'plays' within this chapter, like the original documentary, are derived from archival research and oral histories which are 'deeply informed by, and about, life histories' (Amigoni and Munro 2010).

5.2 *Performing in the Circle: Rounding up the Ladies for the Company*

I begin this chapter with the first of my documentary style plays, *Performing in the Circle: Rounding up the Ladies for the Company*. I am using the participant's first names within this chapter when talking about the plays, to avoid confusion. As with the Vic documentary dramas all material used is from primary sources; no lines have been inserted that were not there in the original interviews. Peter Cheeseman is presented within this research as the active and lucid artistic director he was when I knew him and when he was running the theatre. I am aware that this creates an odd temporality as the characters of Romy and Polly are looking back, but Peter is in a kind of continuous present. In a way he has become a part of his archive as he is represented by it and through literature relating to him. In relation to ageing, this resistance to represent Peter's disease could be seen as a desire not to conflate ageing and incapacity which is in itself problematic. In order to counter this issue, I do recognise Peter in the second play, through Albert's narrative, as an older man, suffering from Parkinsons.

The play has a simple set which is used throughout as an undifferentiated space that variously represents the theatre, the pub and the car. Peter's 'lines' are sometimes taken from reported transcription, offered by one of the other participants; when this occurs they are presented in stanzaic form. When Peter's words are taken from different source material, such as documents or older interviews, I have presented them as they were originally presented, without stanzas. In this way I am acknowledging the different styles of source material which allows the characters differing styles within which they can express themselves; Peter's style of presentation, by the nature of the material, tends to be more formal whereas Romy and Polly's

'lines' are more conversational. There may be a power imbalance here between the very structured and refined speech of Peter and the 'natural' speech of Romy and Polly, whose words have been taken straight from their transcripts and not 'cleaned up' or reworked. I attempt to address this possible power imbalance by using a Brechtian style of presentation.

The following play is the first that I wrote after the autoethnography. It aims to present the similarities and differences between the experiences of the actresses and the thoughts and expressions of Cheeseman and as such has needed to be full in exposition in order to achieve this. The play was shown to both Polly and Romy who commented upon it. Polly commented that much of her interview was 'too personal' and 'waffle'. I have retained many of the cuts which she proposed, discussing with Polly why I have done so. These 'cut' parts of her narrative are often important in showing how Polly's life-course has developed in relation to her association with the Vic; they also demonstrate how her perceptions are both similar to and different from those of Romy. Interestingly, what I found to be central aspects of Polly's narrative seemed irrelevant to her. This shows how narrative enables each reader to find their own resonances and their own 'truth'; it simultaneously highlights the potential struggle over representation.

Performing in the Circle: Rounding up the Ladies for the Company feeds into the overall aims for this chapter by offering a life-course view of all three characters, exploring how their involvement with the theatre and the documentary has affected their ageing. We hear their narratives from a point of reminiscence and see them as younger people (they are played by

actors who are the age they were at the time they worked at the theatre). In this way the play begins to question the stereotypical expectations of ageing and 'older age'.

5.2.1 Scene One: Beginnings at the Vic

Romy (R) and Polly (P) enter UC (the actors' vom).

They each carry large volumes of paper (cuttings from papers, transcriptions, etc.)

The Stage Manager enters with a table and more papers and a reel-to-reel tape recorder and sets this UC. Four chairs are placed around the table.

R and P drop their papers carefully onto the table.

Romy: When I was at drama school in the 60s,

The Victoria theatre, Stoke-on-Trent,

Had this particular reputation

That it was a place of commitment

Where the work mattered above everything.

And that's one of the reasons I applied to the company.

One day when I was out of work

I went to the book shop,

And I always went to the drama section;

And I pulled out *The Knotty*,

And I sat in that book shop,

And I read the introduction,

And I knew that was the company I wanted to work for.

Because it just set out so many principled things;

It was a company with values

And, erm,

I just thought

'Wow! This is the sort of theatre company I would love to be part of.'

R has moved around the table and sits at one of the chairs during this speech; she has become quite emotional. P moves to stand behind R and puts her hands on her shoulder. R regains her composure and smiles up at P.

And so ten years after it opened I arrived,

And it was a thriving, vigorous young company, wasn't it?

She directs the question to Polly

Where you had people staying for two, three, five, seven years,

Some of them.

Polly: To be quite honest I didn't really know much about Stoke.

P moves to sit at one of the other chairs at the table.

It wasn't until I got here and started working

And getting to know people

That I realised what a good place it was.

R looks quizzically at P

Well, it suited me...

Um...

How can I describe it?

The people seemed,

Not kind of theatrical.

The people I met.

And I always felt like I fitted in for those reasons.

Because with my background--

Because I don't come from a theatrical –

You know, University,

Well-educated,

Talking about the arts and literature – Background at all!

I just knew that I wanted to act,

You know –

And that was my sort of creative expression.

Romy: I feel that I didn't start becoming educated really

until I left full time education;

Like a lot of people, you know –

You learn through working

Polly: Peter is of course very down to earth.

He's very good at, er, kind of sensing how to approach people,

I think.

Obviously when he did the audition he's looking for people who

Will...

PC enters UC above the stage through the auditorium. He
moves down to the women?

Peter: Fit in.

Polly: Who will fit.

So you know it wasn't at all daunting.

I felt quite comfortable right from the start really.

I didn't feel any obligation to 'be' an actress.

Romy: You could just be you.

Polly: Yes.

Peter moves around the table as if he is appraising Polly. He moves to her

Peter: Can you sing?

Polly: Yes, I can sing.

Peter: Sing a few verses, then.

Polly: (goes to sing and then continues her story)

And you know it was very immediate and just,

You know,

Of the moment.

Polly looks at Peter who gives her a nod and then she sits down

Peter moved to CS as if he is giving a talk to the theatre

Peter:¹³ I must admit I can't think of any sensible way to run a theatre other than to have a permanent company.

(he holds out his hand indicating Romy and Polly)

¹³ Cheeseman (1972: 17)

I suppose I have always believed in a permanent company because I have never been sympathetic to the philosophies sustaining the commercial structure of theatre nor to the idea of the arts as beacons of excellence. To put it more positively my priorities have been different. I have never been able to see the Arts as a sacred flame nourished by the faithful few. I have only been aware of its potential to help feed the unexpressed and usually inexpressible hunger of the many.

Polly: People would come in to the Vic and they'd say

'Oh, I saw you in...'

And you'd just have a chat and it was nice,

You know it didn't –

There was no sort of mystery about it.

Well, there was a mystery about it,

But it wasn't this kind of

'I am an actress',

But it was different,

You know.

It wasn't that sort of mystery.

It was nice,

A sort of magical mystery.

Peter has finished his 'speech' and moves back to join Romy and Polly

Peter: So, did you feel part of the community? Did you get involved in it?

Polly: Oh yes,

Very much so,

Very much so.

You know,

There was 'The Old House at Home'

During this speech Polly moves the chairs on one side of the table so that they are in a row as if at a bar. She sits down and Peter moves to the other side of the table standing, as if he is the bar-keeper. He lifts two glasses from a shelf under the table and puts them in front of Polly and Romy as she also sits. The lighting changes to give the feeling of a public house.

And you went in there –

That was the pub –

And you went in there

And you got to know everybody,

You know,

The regulars,

And you became a regular.

Romy: Yes.

Romy joins Polly at 'the bar' and accepts her glass from Peter.

Part of the ethos

Was that the actors should mingle with the audience afterwards

And Peter was always against having a green room,

So if you wanted to have, er...

What did we do?

Polly and Romy raise their glasses to each other and the audience

Oh, we all went along to the pub, of course,

That was a regular place to go.

Polly: Yes.

Romy: And we got to know the people at the pub,

And they got to know us,

And that was another way of being involved in the community.

Polly: It was just a little kind of village, really,

Polly and Romy stand and Peter moves the chairs back to their original positions.

And it was...

And the theatre fitted into that in the way that –

I mean, there was the butcher, the baker, the clothes shop,

The antique, the theatre, the newsagents.

Romy: So it was just part of the village.

Polly: Maybe now there are lots of theatres where that's the case,

But, I mean, then I think it was quite... you know –

There weren't quite so many thirty-odd years ago.

Peter has finished tidying 'the bar' and has moved back to his CS position. He is again giving his talk to the audience.

Peter:¹⁴ The problem with winning an audience, of bridging the gap, cannot be solved in a general way. The problem of communication can only be solved specifically – person to person. A writer, director, group of actors in one place get to know their audience in all its complexity (it's not as simple as a couple of thousand regulars) and all its specificness. They can share in the process a theatre undergoes in creating a working contact with the community.

Romy: That was always Peter's approach.

That was the basis of it.

I've been looking at some of the early papers you've written

Romy turns to Peter. Peter moves over to her and looks at one of the papers she has taken from the table and is looking at

And, um, interviews,

In the 60s,

And that comes out right from the beginning.

Peter nods and hands the paper back to her

Polly: (Talking to the audience)

¹⁴ Cheeseman (1971: 79)

They were separate, the theatre and the community,
But our place in the community was accepted,
And I think functioned in the right way.

I don't think we put people off.

I think we drew people to us

Which is, you know... as much as anyone can –

Do you know what I mean?

Romy: (Also to the audience.).

They were doing –

They were making contact with the local factories,

You know,

Peter: (addressing one area of the audience) Would you like talks
in your lunch break?'

Romy: You know.

It was, right from the very beginning,

We are part of this community,

You know,

Let's get out there,

Let's find out what it's all about and

It's a two-way thing, isn't it?

Let them see that we are human beings

Who want to contribute something.

Polly: And that it's not an elitist environment.

Romy: Yes.

A lot of people who were involved with the company

Talk of it as a family. The Vic family.

PC moves to sit on the table at the opposite end to Polly, the lights alter so that the table is now lit on its own – it has become a car. P and R turn their chairs to face the direction the car is going in.

Polly: I can remember having a conversation with Peter.

We were all sitting in a car,

And I was in the back,

And we were all musing on how long would we all be working at
the Victoria theatre?

Would we all still be there when we were 60?

And it was –

Peter: Oh, yes –

Polly: Peter said –

Peter: Course she will.

Polly will be drawing her old age pension

But she'll still be working at the Vic.

Romy: Peter was determined to stay.

Peter:¹⁵ I must stay here as long as I am useful to the theatre and the place
– an active lifetime if possible – and I certainly plan to.

Romy: How long did you stay? (directs this to P)

Polly: I was there for about three years

And then I think I popped back.

But, I mean, I'm pretty sure,

If my life hadn't gone in a different direction at that point,

That I would have come back,

In time,

If they would have had me.

Because, as I said at the beginning,

This suited me,

It really suited me

And it kind of spoiled you for working anywhere else then.

I got married

And then I had children -

And you know -

Things went in a different path.

But had that not happened I'm sure,

You know,

That I would have come back...

¹⁵ Rowell and Jackson (1984:157).

The car lighting fades out and the stage is back to normal lighting
P and R and PC turn their chairs back to the table.

5.2.2 Scene Two: The Documentaries

PC is at the top of the table and holds a sheaf of papers in his hand. He reads from one of them. P and R listen intently.

Peter:¹⁶ The creation of the documentary is a complex process and therefore needs to be kept organisationally in as much order as humanly possible. What can be kept in order must be kept in order. Then we can get the best possible results with the marvellously rich material we've got.

Polly: To start with I didn't really know...

Do you know what I mean?

Peter: What you were letting yourself in for?

Polly: Exactly.

I didn't really understand what actually was going on

I think Peter pushed this tape recorder at us

And said:

Peter points to the reel-to-reel tape recorder on the table and pushes it in R's direction

¹⁶ These notes come from one of the performer's 'research wallets' within the archive (SHEL 1973: folder One, Box 12).

Peter: Why don't you go down to Shelton Bar

And see what's going on?

Polly: He'd obviously had an inkling of what was going on down there, you know.

I mean we didn't particularly know.

Peter: Go down and see if you can find out what's going on

Polly: You know

She looks at the audience for support and asks them

I don't know if you ever went to Shelton Bar?

I mean, it's a steel works and all...

In the archive there are some pictures on the wall...

A picture of P interviewing a steel works employee appears on four screens hanging UC, CL, CR and DC.R jumps up and points to the picture DC



Figure 5.1 Polly

Romy: Oh, look, you're over there

Polly: Oh, am I?

P moves over towards the picture DC and squints up at it.

Polly: And what looked like a child was standing

With these steel-workers.

P directs the next line to R

Polly: It was so incongruous,

You know.

Romy: (laughs) Yeah.

Polly: You look like an absolute twit standing there,

You know,

But we did it,

We must have done it.

I just kind of grew into it.

The image on the screens changes to a picture of part of the foundry with dirt, sparks and large machinery



Figure 5.2 Foundry

I mean they have their own railway system.

These enormous –

As we found out afterwards when we could see in subsequent visits –

Molten steel –

You know this enormous, enormous sinter plant,

And all these pulleys and conveyor belts and men working,

You know, and, er,

The muck and the grime and the sweat and the heat.

You know you don't normally –

If you work in the theatre –

You don't normally do that sort of thing, do you?

The image on the screens changes to a picture of a foundry worker with a shower of sparks covering him and the floor



Figure 5.3 shower of sparks

Romy: It was an opening up of the world,
The community,
And it was work that felt worthwhile.
It wasn't fantasy land –
Not that there's anything wrong with fantasy land, I love it
(laughs), escapism and all that –
But that's why for me the documentary experience was so
different.

The image on the screens changes again to an image of a man in a full-length coat with hat prodding a metal bar into a blazing pit.



Figure 5.4 blazing pit

Polly: It wasn't frightening,

But it was something completely new and unknown.

You really didn't know where this was leading, you know;

You didn't know what people were going to say.

How were they going to react to these actors

Sort of tip-toeing around through the muck?-

And then it progressed,

And we got to know one or two blokes there,

And it kind of developed.

And then we actually started the interviews

And we got to go around to people's houses,

You know,

And then we interviewed the wives,

You know,

And it just kind of built up like that,

You know,

And these people were living just up the road, so...

Peter: It mattered.

Polly: Exactly, exactly.

Enormous responsibility;

Very immediate and very...

So it was very exciting in that sense.

I can't really remember why or how,

But I sort of got involved in the songs,

The musical side of it,

And ended up sort of writing a couple of the songs in it

During this speech PC has been looking carefully at one of the transcriptions.

Peter: We need a song here, and you sing (directs this to P)

Polly: (to audience)

You know.

Peter: You've done this sort of thing.

We need a song for this.

PC points at the paper in his hand and gives it to P

Polly: And so you went away,

And you kind of did it.

Romy: (directs this to the audience)

Polly was quite strongly involved in attending the meetings

And making recordings,

More so than I was.

Umm, and then, of course,

The whole thing of putting the whole thing together

Is the next step in the process.

You've got this body of material.

It's an on-going process:

What are we going to make of it?

And how on earth are we going to structure all this material

To tell the story?

Umm, so that was, - er, -

Something that the three of us,

With Peter,

Were involved in, and instrumental in making decisions.

The documentary itself was very different,

Very special.

This was an experience,

A real experience that these workers were going through and were facing,

Which was something which was much,

Much bigger than anything I'd come across before.

The image on the screen changes to an enormous container. A man stands at the side of the container, emphasising the gap between his size and the container



Figure 5.5 tipping container

And so it took us out of this safe nurturing,
Learning environment.
Right into the heart of the district,
And so to be involved in that was a big learning experience for me,
And we got very involved in the arguments
And people's attitudes to Shelton Bar,
What it meant to them and their families,
By either interviewing people themselves
Or going through the tapes afterwards.

PC has moved to the DC auditorium steps during this last speech

The image on two of the screens changes but remains the same on the other two.



Figure 5.6 Peter Cheeseman

Peter:¹⁷ The following notes set the procedures we must follow over the next few weeks.

The following is a recorded voice over of PC's voice. During this time PC, R and P look through the papers on the desk and react accordingly with the narration.

Peter: (voice recording)

There will be three stages in the production of the script and each page will be labelled accordingly.

Peter: (says live) One: Rough

As PC says each of these titles he holds up a copy of the relevant paper.

Peter: (voice recording) This will be material in only as much sequence as possible, transcribed on the Theatre's NEW UHER¹⁸ from clear instructions from PC or other members of the research committee. These instructions will comprise the SHEL¹⁹ number, leader colour, UHER index numbers and starting and finishing phrases for identification purposes.

One typing only should be done of the rough which will be used in first BLOCKING rehearsal when it will be put into sequence, stage directions and script additions made. Typing should be right across the page but well spaced

¹⁷ Notes taken from the research wallet of the performers – explaining how the process would work.

¹⁸ UHER refers to the portable reel-to-reel tape recorder used by the company.

¹⁹ SHEL refers to Shelton Bar and was the term used to relate the material to the documentary.

between speeches. Each extract must be labelled after it and to the right with the SHEL tape number, leader colour and Uher index numbers, all in brackets.

Peter: (says live) Two: First script

Peter: (voice recording) This must be stencilled, only using 2/3 of the page and double spacing between lines. The one third clear spaces should be to right of each page.

$\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch space should be left between the speeches.

Stage directions and character names to be all in caps. Tape identification to right of each speech as in rough.

This will be the main rehearsal script. Amendments are to be made in rehearsal.

Peter: (says live) Three: Final script

Peter: (voice recording)

This must be stencilled and like the first script except using full page and headed, centre, SHEL Final.

Peter: (live) Songs.

Peter: (voice recording) Songs will generally only pass through the FIRST SCRIPT and FINAL SCRIPT phase.

Peter: (live) No copies must be destroyed till the show is on
unless instructed to by the contrary PC.²⁰

R and P look at each other and smile
PC sees the look between the two women and goes on to say:

Peter:²¹ You have to have recourse to a ruthless, arbitrary, superficial tidying up to make it seem less chaos than it is. But you have to be careful not to use this direction to make Cheeseman pudding, which would only be the same as a writer's play.

As PC says these last lines he moves back to the table and puts his papers down

Romy: We would go through all the abstracts and think 'is this a good story?'

'Is this something personal?'

'Where are the salient moments?'

'What is the progression in this story?'

But it was Peter's major decision that he wanted to involve the steel-making process throughout the show.

Which is a brilliant dramatic device,

Because most of the material is quite dry really;

²⁰ It has been pointed out that this could have been a typing error and may have meant to read 'Unless instructed to the contrary by PC'. Whilst this could well be the case it does feel as if the version I have included here is appropriate.

²¹ Thornber (1970)

It's just people in meetings.

Although the emotional drive from the characters in those meetings is strong,

This inter-cutting those scenes with songs

And working process made it into drama,

Made it more dramatic.

Peter:²² The process is like a kind of inverted pyramid, gradually involving more and more people till the middle of rehearsals, when the entire company is directly contributing to the making of the show. One important discipline now emerges. If there is no primary source material available on a particular topic, no scene can be made about it. The whole distinct character of these shows derives from this self-imposed rule. It is a rule that ensures that a multiplicity of voices are heard in the documentary. The fact that the process of creation of the text is controlled by a group of people, even under fairly strong leadership, rather than by one person, also tends to preserve the contradiction of viewpoint inherent in every historical event, controlled as it is by a number of people.

P has risen and is again looking at the picture of herself which is again visible on the screens around the auditorium. She is now remembering

²² Ibid.



Figure 5.7 Polly

Polly: I was presented at one point with a Royal Doulton figure–

She was called Victoria –

Which I've still got,

Of course,

Pride of place.

Erm, so that,

It was that sort of –

Things like that don't normally happen in theatre, do they?

It was very much a sort of –

I don't know –

One felt a part of the works,

Sort of like someone might get a gold watch
And a little presentation or something.
It was a very special time,
And I'm very proud of that,
Very proud of that.
Funnily enough, I don't often think about it, actually,
But thinking about it now,
That was,
Yes, a kind of mini-achievement, really,
Certainly of my career,
But also of life in general.
I always felt that my career,
Short though it was,
Had been successful.
I never felt,
Ooh, you know,
I never quite made it,
Or I didn't achieve this or that.
And also, I think –
But I think the seeds if this were in me anyway,
I felt so comfortable here,
This idea that it doesn't matter who you are

And what you do.

Everybody's got a story,

Everybody's story is important in a sense.

Romy: It's right here

Polly: Exactly.

Yes, um,

Finding value in your own community,

What's around you.

And being at the Vic re-enforced that,

Which gave me the confidence to think

'Yes, that is a valuable way of looking at things,

That does mean something.'

Romy: Yes, that makes sense.

Polly: But it has influenced me enormously.

The main thing I would say is that it's

Given me this confidence in my way of

Looking at things.

I found myself living in the country, um,

No easy access to libraries, theatres...

And I wanted to give my children as much,

You know,

Feed their imaginations and so on,

And so you do,
 You find things which are there on your doorstep;
 You use what's around you and you can,
 You can do that.
 It's just that confidence, I would say.
 Whereas, I think, for instance,
 I've only just thought of this and this is probably rubbish,
 But say I'd gone to the Royal Shakespeare Company
 And played a couple of lead roles,
 And got a lot of publicity
 And then had gone and done what I've done,
 Got married, and –
 Maybe I would have felt a complete failure
 Because I would have thought
 'Ooh maybe I should be up there',
 You know,
 Everyone should be talking about me,
 And I should be – and I'm not,
 I'm just stuck in this little village with these kids and, you know,
 I can't afford to go to the theatre –
 Do you see what I mean?

Peter has been listening to Polly's story and now moves to CS to
 continue his talk to the audience

Peter²³: For me documentary drama is the celebration of a community's stories. I believe it is very important [...] to give utterance to the voice of the community itself, to tell stories from within the community that would not otherwise be heard.

I have always believed this to be the most useful political job the theatre could do – to reflect the life of the district in such a way that we, its voters in a democracy, really believe that we are important and that important things happen here.

Romy: Working on the documentary made theatre terribly interesting

And as it happened I moved out of acting anyway,

And it probably appealed to me.

It was, um,-

It was more than just learning a part and performing,

So for me it had another dimension to it

And it wasn't long before –

Well, a year later –

I was thinking of moving out of theatre and going to do

Community work.

²³ Cheeseman (1988)(see Appendix 2.1)

I had decided that I wanted to be more involved in the
Community and, um,

I decided to do a youth and community work course at Manchester.

So that was another great learning experience.

The Vic work built on, um, the intuitive stuff in me,

But I can't say it was the work at the Vic that pushed me into it;

I suppose it just helped me to um crystallise what –

You know –

What made me tick,

R and P and PC begin to collect the papers together and tidy them into
piles.

It felt very worthwhile.

It felt important.

I remember Peter being asked at the time

(P holds out an imaginary microphone to PC)

Polly: Do you think it made a difference to the outcome?

Romy: And I can remember Peter saying:

Peter²⁴: (speaks into the imaginary microphone)

Well, it boosted the men's morale

And it alerted people to what was going on.

²⁴ These are Romy's recollections of Peter's words

It raised the profile to people who wouldn't necessarily understand.

(Polly and Peter return to tidying up)

Polly: At the time

We did believe that the documentary could achieve its aims,

Oh yes, at the time,

Because of all the arguments put forward in the play, you know:

I do think it achieved something –

Not for everybody,

Because I don't know how many people were employed there,

But I think that for many who worked there

It was extremely important

Because it put Shelton Bar on the map.

And Shelton Bar's closing

And the fact that people put up a fight –

And that is in that archive –

And sons and daughters,

Or whatever,

People in 50 years' time tracking back,

Like they do now, you know,

'Who was my Great-Grandfather?', and all this.

Erm,

I mean, I don't know what's been built there,

But, you know,

Shelton Bar –

Such an important thing in this area for so long –

I mean, if it had just closed with nothing –

I mean, like people are talking about it now

And will go on talking about it.

What Peter did –

He's given it a place in history.

Peter:²⁵ I've often thought that, in the old village community, the experience of old people used to be passed on to young people. That doesn't happen in the modern community anything like as much. Parents are separated from children, children are separated from parents and grandparents. The old people do not talk to the young people anything like the extent they used to. Simply huge tracts of historical experience are lost and we only get the knowledge and experience of the past through a distorting mirror. So, I want to look for important stories which the community could tell to itself. That's the most important thing for me.

The image on the screen changes to a picture taken of the production of Fight for Shelton Bar! with the actors processing around the stage holding banners with slogans such as 'S.O.S- Save our Shelton'

²⁵ Nevitt (1986: 9)



Figure 5.8 Image from *Fight for Shelton Bar!*

The stage fades to black as all exit UC.

5.3 Analysis of narrative

In the process of creating the narrative analysis (Polkinghorne 1995) which is presented in play form above I discovered themes, which resonated for me, running through and across the narratives of my participants. The idea of ‘beginnings’ focusing on how the participants came to work at the Vic was an initial thematic strand which was followed by that of links between the community and the theatre with the idea of location as central to this link. The ties between the Vic and the community are expanded in an exploration of the involvement of the participants in the creation of the documentary. This exploration then opens up the analysis of the perceived effect which an involvement with the Vic and the documentary has had on the participant’s life-courses. The final thematic strand which I highlight is that of the success of the documentary both as a tool in the fight to save the steel works and as a way of forging links across generations. I now go on to use analysis of narrative (Polkinghorne 1995) to discuss

these emergent thematic strands and complete this phase of the chapter with a reflection on the process of constructing *Performing in the Circle: Rounding up the Ladies for the Company*.

5.3.1 Beginnings at the Vic

Both Romy and Polly created narratives involving their starting point with the Vic: why they had gone there and what they had found in the company. Their impetus for joining the company was quite different. Both were young women in the 1960s but with very different outlooks. Romy was politically aware, coming from a drama school training, and had researched her future and chosen the theatre because she felt it fitted with her own ideological viewpoint, beliefs and values. She went on to describe at length the educative role which the theatre had for its young acting company and how much she gained from the daily lessons in music and other related areas. It is important to acknowledge this aspect of Romy's narrative here, as it has not been included in as much detail within the play, primarily because it was not an issue which resonated across narratives. Polly's stories of 'learning' at and from the Vic do not mention these lessons and Peter has not discussed them at any length in previous interviews.

There is clearly a further issue of selection/exclusion here which has enabled me to include this material here in the analysis but not in the play. This is an example of the benefit of using both narrative analysis in the form of the play and analysis of narrative as seen here. Both offer a slightly different view of the material and allow for different aspects to be foregrounded. It also parallels the documentary process, in that the documentary misses out

aspects of the participants' narrative due to its chosen focus and its desire to focus on historical truth rather than narrative truth, and to time restraints.

Polly's beginnings at the Vic were far more pragmatic. Polly had moved into theatre from a non-academic and non-artistic family background and expressed concern that she might not have been accepted by a professional acting company. From the start of her association with the Vic Polly felt comfortable with Cheeseman and the Company. Even the audition process was non-threatening. Unlike Romy, Polly's emotional connection with the theatre grew from working there, yet she felt immediately at home in the environment; somehow it was a perfect fit. In a similar way it was a 'fit' for Romy but she discovered this prior to being employed there. The education offered by the Vic had a political bias, which Romy would seem to have looked towards; it is uncertain whether Polly was aware of this or not. For Polly it is important that she felt a connection with the company and its members, that she felt comfortable and not 'out of her depth'. Both participants are remembering themselves as younger women, their narratives offering a version of themselves across generations, re-created and re-presented for the interview. It is this acknowledgement of the younger woman being linked to and ultimately 'creating' the older woman – this life-course perspective – which the play draws out in order to highlight the individual nature of ageing.

The play introduces Peter through the 'characters' of Romy and Polly, they offer the audience a personal insight into the man as well as the theatre. From the start Polly highlights Peter's sculpting of the company. It is important that they all 'fit in'. Both Polly and Romy discovered that they did 'fit'. Yet Polly, in a section of the interview which is not included within

the play, does speak of members of the company who found it a difficult place to work and did not feel the same 'fit'. She believes that this was due to some actors wanting to be recognised in their own right rather than as a part of the bigger company. The Ages and Stages group interviews also show that whilst most of the participants found the theatre and themselves a good fit, some did not enjoy their experience there. Those who did 'fit' were encouraged to stay; the use of a permanent company made this possible. It is perhaps this ability to build a company of actors who could all fit together, with similar outlooks and political positions, which allowed both Polly and Romy to feel comfortable and which creates a cohesive and supportive familial community within the theatre.

Peter's lines are less narrative and more statement, chosen to work alongside the narratives of both Polly and Romy. They begin by offering some of Peter's background and his philosophical view-point. The statement 'I have never been able to see the Arts as a sacred flame nourished by the faithful few' has similarities with Polly's feelings of the theatre being accepting of her no matter what her background; for both Polly and Peter the Arts were a space open to all, rather than a narrow elite.

5.3.2 Community

The idea of a familial community within the Vic is only one of the understandings of community which are offered through the participants' narratives. The participants go on to describe communities of place, with the Vic as a 'part of the village' alongside the pub and the

newsagents. They move onto discuss personal communities describing the building of relationships with audience members, as well as 'locals' at the pub who may never have set foot within the theatre. The final form of community which is discussed is that formed through the creation of the documentary, involving the bringing together of two separate communities (the theatre and the steel works), resulting in a respect and deeper understanding on both sides.

Polly and Romy both tell stories of finding links to the audiences and local community in which the Vic was located, feeling that over time, they were accepted within it. The participants' narratives offer an understanding of the basis from which the relationship between audience and performer was formed. This can be seen as an example of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) created by the intimate nature of the theatre and acting space, as well as the documentary acting style, which allowed the audience to feel they were seeing and becoming familiar with the performer as well as the character he or she was playing. It is not only the participants who feel personal communities growing over time, they recognise that the theatre itself has gradually been accepted as an intrinsic part of this localised village community. Polly points out that Peter has moulded the situation so that the actors have no choice but to become embedded in the community, as there were no facilities offered at the theatre, it is 'part of the ethos'. Cheeseman's aim for the theatre was for it to be accepted as having a similar role to the pub within the community, a bringing together of all walks of life into a social environment where they can feel accepted and part of a community of their choosing. Cheeseman shifts his 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of the 'ideal' theatre out of his imagination (and the audiences) and into the streets of Stoke-on-Trent in order to

become part of that community and feed the ‘inexpressible hunger’ for the Arts which he believes exists there.

The micro community of the Vic is also a major part of the participants’ narratives. As mentioned above, they refer to this theatrical world at the Vic as a ‘family’ and as such it took a central role within both Polly’s and Romy’s young lives whilst they were working there. These narratives also highlight the life-phase nature of their links to the theatre. The theatre is seen as one part of their early life-courses; for Romy it is a learning ground from which she moves onto community work (and eventually teaching) and for Polly it has been a safe place in which she has felt nurtured and able to gain in confidence. Whilst both women see their time at the theatre as a phase in their lives they do acknowledge its lasting effect upon their life-course and ageing.

The final form of community presented within Polly and Romy’s narratives (and supported by Peter) are those relating to the opening up of new understandings between the two communities of the theatre and Shelton Bar steel works, achieved through the creation and presentation of the documentary *Fight for Shelton Bar!* Polly’s surprise at her own childish image in the photograph (Figure 5.1) and her acknowledgment of the incongruence of her appearance seems to point to a questioning of herself as a younger person and her ability (at the time) to relate to the ‘real’ issues and men involved in those issues, which was so far removed from her ‘reality’. It is perhaps significant that she goes on in the narrative to talk about what she learned from her experiences at the Vic, suggesting that she would feel more congruent in the situation as an older woman. Through the documentary, the communities of

the Vic and of Shelton Bar were coming into contact, enabling each to shift and expand. As Polly grows in confidence and understanding with the men of Shelton Bar so they appear to do the same towards her, as expressed by the presentation of a Wedgwood figurine. Polly links the formal presentation of this gift to the long-service award, making connections across generations and for the purposes of this thesis across the chapter (the idea of long service awards is discussed by the older sources of *Fight for Shelton Bar!* within *The retirement: Closing the circle*).

5.3.3 Life-course

Whilst there are implicit references throughout Polly and Romy's narratives to the impact that the Vic and working on *Fight for Shelton Bar!* had on their life-courses, these are seen explicitly when Polly recalls the experience of working with the Shelton Bar men as one that has stayed with her as 'a sort of mini-achievement' in her life. She makes intergenerational links between the confidence which she gained through her time at the Vic and her work on the documentary to how she has brought up her children. She recognises the importance of locality, community and listening to stories; using this knowledge to educate and entertain her children. Bruner (1990: 47) talks of narrative knowledge as having the ability to 'forge links between the exceptional and the ordinary', which is something which Polly has also discovered through her time working at the Vic. The play links this discovery with Peter's belief that documentaries 'are a celebration of a community's stories'. He is making a similar point to

Polly's: we do not have to look outside our own community for historically important events. What goes on within our community is important.

Polly has discovered the philosophical and political heart of the Vic through her work there. The experience has been one of 'Finding value in your own community, What's around you'. It has enabled her to gain an understanding of what is important to her and to feel confident enough to pass this to her own children. In a similar way, Romy has taken her experiences of the Vic and has combined them with her previously learned, and what she considers to be innate, abilities, in order to make intergenerational and community links, first working within the community and then going on to teach a younger generation Drama and English at senior school level. It is perhaps understandable that Romy's primary focus at the Vic was towards the educative side of the theatre. She feels she was already a full person before coming to the Vic but the experience was a learning one and one which helped her to develop her strengths and focus her ideas. Peter Cheeseman picked someone who would 'fit' once again.

Polly uses the interview for this thesis to gain further 'narrative knowledge' (Bruner 1990) making links between working at the Vic and her satisfaction with life and her career choices. She expresses a possible vulnerability inherent in performers which encourages them to look at their life-course as successful or not, dependent upon how much fame or external recognition they have achieved in their careers. Polly believes that she is comfortable with her lack of 'fame' due to her work at the Vic and the philosophical views which she encountered

and worked within there. It has built on her value system so that she is able to see her work with regard to community and culture rather than simply in artistic terms.

5.3.4 Achievements of *Fight for Shelton Bar!*

Whilst the documentary did not and – due to the political climate – could not achieve its ultimate goal, to keep Shelton Bar steel works fully open, Polly, Romy and Peter agree that it did achieve a great deal. In Polly's mind, Peter achieved his goal of making the local community important in their own and others' eyes. Polly links the documentary to the archive and adds directly to this thesis by discussing the importance of memory, family, and intergenerational relations. Polly assesses the importance of both the documentary and the archive in enabling future generations to feel proud of their ancestors, enabling older generations to look back on their lives and share their pride with a younger generation. To have their history acknowledged in a positive way enabling generations to come to feel proud of the community's achievements.

The documentary brought people into the theatre who might not otherwise have attended. It forged links between the industrial city of Stoke-on-Trent and the theatre which sat at its heart. For Peter the theatre became a 'treasured possession' (Cheeseman 1970: xix) of the community and perhaps as accepted as the public house. Peter comments on the postmodern world and its loss of close-knit families as well as the depletion and often loss of stories being passed on from generation to generation which in turn create history. It is Peter's belief that in creating this documentary the community are telling their own stories to themselves, thus fulfilling the role of the older generation. It is Polly who points out fiercely the lasting legacy of

the archive and the role this has in extending and expanding the role of the documentary for generations to come.

5.3.5 Reflections on process

The process of making the *Fight for Shelton Bar!* documentary, though organic in its nature, was very much shaped and contained within a tight organisational structure. I highlight this structure through the voice-over section of the play. Voice-over was used frequently in documentary dramas, often the ‘real’ person’s voice was taken from an interview and played as part of the drama. This sat interestingly alongside the voice of the actor playing that part. The juxtaposition of a young actor and an older person’s voice on tape acts as a visual and vocal reminder of the importance of the life -course narrative within the drama. The procedures that ‘must be followed’ are very finely detailed in this section and there is an awareness that these are immovable ‘laws’ of the Vic documentary, only to be breached by the artistic director. It would appear from Polly and Romy’s narratives, and I must acknowledge from my own experience, what a powerful presence Cheeseman had within the Vic theatre. (This is also highlighted by Albert Cooper in the next play within this chapter). Peter is also very aware that this power, if overused or abused, could prevent the company from creating a multi-perspective documentary and presenting the ‘contradiction of viewpoint’ that is so important to him. However, it would seem fair to say that he has put his print onto *Fight for Shelton Bar!* as more than just a ‘ruthless tidier of chaos’.

Whilst *Performing in the Circle: Rounding up the Ladies for the Company* mirrors Cheeseman's documentary techniques it has not maintained a 'contradiction of viewpoint', having been created by one individual. To attempt to overcome this reflections follow which explain and clarify my thought process in making the play, including making transparent the omissions from the original narratives. I move on to look at the mediated nature of memory, and how this affected both the narratives and the play. I then link memory to narration and discuss narrative and historical truth in relation to both the original documentary and this play's creation.

Polly's comments on the first draft of the play were similar to Romy's. She took a lot of time to go through the play-script and cut her own part quite drastically. As stated earlier, I have not made all of the cuts Polly requested as they were sent as suggestions rather than expectations. As one of the key members of the research committee for *Fight for Shelton Bar!* Polly seems to be replicating the rules and processes which she adhered to during this original production. During this time the narrative focus was firmly placed on the fight to keep Shelton Bar open and although much of the interview material did explore the personal lives of the workers and their families, much of this was not included in the final documentary as it would not have driven the narrative forward. It would appear that Polly and to some extent Romy are looking at this 'play' with a similarly critical eye. Polly's attitude is perhaps a good indicator of why *Fight for Shelton Bar!* doesn't contain many of the personal stories (which often relate to life-course) narrated by the steel workers to the research team and still present in the archived recordings.

As noted above, the narratives of Romy, Polly and Peter come from different sources. Polly and Romy are looking at their life-course using memory and reflection. Radstone (2000: 11) talks of 'the highly mediated nature of memory': memory brings with it a number of issues, such as the factual accuracy of the memory and distortion of the memory over time as well as the participant's ability to re-write their own history in light of their current situation. It also involves the communal/collaborative aspects of memory in that memory is in some respects relational. Polly commented that it would have been good to be interviewed with Romy rather than separately, which would have brought this aspect of memory firmly into play. The decision to interview separately stemmed from my desire to explore differences in experience as well as similarities. I acknowledged that a joint interview was likely to create more similarity than difference.

Narration and memory thus become events in themselves and not simply reports of events. I am working with 'narrative truth' rather than 'historical truth' where the emphasis is on verification of the 'facts' of the memory (Spence 1984: 279). In contrast to this, narrative truth is based on memories which, as Ray (2000) points out, are largely social constructions created through conversations and narrative conventions. She goes on to say that 'a memory has narrative truth when it captures an experience to the satisfaction of those telling and listening to it' (Ray 2000: 113). Polly's desire to 'check the facts' of my plays creates a tension between the narrative truth which I am working with and the desire to present 'historical truth' which Cheeseman was attempting to achieve. By using historical truth drawn from the research wallets and placing this alongside the narrative truth of Romy and Polly I am attempting to re-

dress Polly's criticism and show the workings of the documentary process juxtaposed with the subjective experiences that this process created for the participants.

5.4 Narratives from the archive

In order to make further connections between narrative truth and historical truth I moved on from the creation of plays and into the archive, a place which I felt would be alien to me, having never worked in an archive before. However, that was not to be the case. I found it a place, like the Vic, filled with Peter Cheeseman. I was reading Cheeseman's own narrative creation. This archive was another facet of his and the Vic's interconnected and inseparable narrative. The difference here was that it felt as if I really was viewing a community's stories; I was getting the fuller picture rather than the time-restricted and narrative-driven story that the documentary itself offered. Clearly the 'historical truth' present in the archive was mediated; I was still being focused and guided by Cheeseman and his research team, as I could only work with the material which had been collected at the time. That is why I expand this archive with my own current interviews and my own plays.

Like the Vic research committee, I began by doing some piecing together and found that one scene was mentioned on a number of occasions within the performers' research wallets and within Cheeseman's notes. This is a scene which was created using both narrative truth in the form of interview material and historical truth in the form of minutes from meetings. This became a good place to begin to analyse how the final documentary script came into being and what it had started from, where it had shifted to and what had been left behind or left out. I

began by finding all of the material relating to this scene, from initial notes and audio recordings from interviews through to initial script ideas, revisions and finished version. I focused on material relating to the life-course, ageing and intergenerational relationships and community, and the following section of this thesis explores the findings and conclusions I came to whilst undertaking this exploration.

5.5 Source analysis : *Mill Meeting 1* (Cheeseman 1977: 38)

<i>Archival material used for source analysis:</i>
<i>Detailed tape abstract 33</i> – green leader 23.11.73 and continuation pink leader
<i>Present: Ted Smith, Frank Oldacre, Alf Wakefield, Mill men (noon shift).</i>
<i>Polly Warren, Phillip Donnellan and film crew present.</i>
<i>First script – mill meeting 1 –</i>
<i>Characters: Frank, Ted, Dennis Storey, Voice; Mill workers.</i>
<i>Prompt copy</i>
<i>Published script</i>

Figure 5.9 – Archived material for Mill meeting

As my first play highlights, the research process of the Victoria theatre was a rigorous one, set by Cheeseman. The research team comprised two production secretaries, three actors and Peter Cheeseman as artistic director. The actors were chosen from the company to take on the role of researchers and were released from other productions to allow them the time to do this. For many of the scenes the research team then put together a ‘rough copy’ of the script

which often came in the form of a cut and pasted scrap book, taking parts from copies of the original transcripts and sometimes placing them in a new order or mixing pieces of one person's transcript with another (this is especially true for the factual data used to describe the steel-making process). For this scene there does not appear to be a rough copy of the script. I presume that this was considered not necessary as many of the speeches were taken whole from the transcript and thus did not need to be cut and pasted in the usual way.

As noted above, Cheeseman made an artistic decision to juxtapose the scenes of the play relating to the fight to save the works with the actual process of steel-making carried out there. Cheeseman in his notes on the scenes of the play writes, 'It would also, I felt, be possible to place the scenes of each stage of the fight in such a relationship with the production process, that each one provided imagery for the other' (1977: 51). This narrative logic does seem to dictate what gets incorporated in the play and thus what gets left out. The Mill scene, which I am looking at here, comes towards the end of the play and as such is a part of the last stages of the entire narrative. It starts by describing the focus of the narrative which is to be presented within the scene: the action committee's brochure and the decision which has been taken by the committee to suggest that the works must be saved as a whole and that they will not sanction closing parts of the works and keeping others open.

This scene has a far more detailed abstract than many of the other scenes. Parts of the abstract were fully transcribed and it is on these transcriptions that I am basing my original analysis. The second source came from a folder which each performer was given as the research process progressed. This contained a 'first script' put together by the research group

and is a detailed honing down of the material presented in the abstract. The actors worked from this first script during rehearsal. Further cuts, if considered necessary, were made during the rehearsal process, and the first script was then amended and labelled 'first script, first revision', 'second revision' and so on. For this scene the first script was used without revisions though with a number of cuts being made (as the script was not re-ordered it was not considered necessary to mark these cuts as revised version).

I have also worked from the prompt script which was the script on which the performance was based throughout the run. For *Fight for Shelton Bar!* there is also a published script (published by Methuen in 1977). As far as the Mill scene is concerned, this script is an exact representation of the prompt copy. The cuts made from first script to final script are easily seen as the first script was used as the actors' working copy throughout rehearsals and the cut lines were drawn through with pencil. It is more difficult to assess which parts of the original transcripts were omitted from the first script and ultimately the final prompt script and I have closely followed the archived transcripts to gain this information. The thematic patterns which appear over the analysis of the omissions in the final script for this scene can be seen as follows: references to fighting and violence and to divisions or disagreement within the works; personal depth of feeling and emotion; intergenerational and age-related issues.

Many of the omissions around fighting/violence and disagreement within the works are likely to have been made in order to present a cohesive and supportive 'community' of men with whom the audience could identify. The presentation of internal divisions and violence could have led the documentary down a more political path. Woodruff (1995) discusses this

omission within the documentaries expressing a view that when the community is seen as offering its full support to the fight to save the steel works and any opposition is seen as coming from outside of the Potteries, then the clear conflict between ‘the small minority who own and control the land, factories, and machinery and the large majority who earn a living selling their labour’ (Woodruff 1995: 112) can be resolved. The ‘community’ within the steel works and within Stoke-on-Trent can then return to being viewed as one homogeneous whole. The inclusion of this material would have alienated much of the audience and highlighted the problematic meanings behind Cheeseman’s desire to ‘give voice to the community’.

I begin this textual, source analysis by looking at the finished scene (see Appendix 5.1) and then moving on to highlight the avoided and/or missing themes described above. In the published script for *Fight for Shelton Bar!* Cheeseman offers the reader notes on each of the scenes. He describes *Mill Meeting 1* as follows:

This was the great crisis in the last days before the Finniston Tuesday meeting [...] Ted was exhausted and ill over the weekend before the Finniston meeting. He also felt reluctant to talk the mill men out of their troubled state of mind, naturally wanting it to be a kind of spontaneous gesture of support [...] Polly recorded the first one on the Friday evening – a magnificent speech. Three mill shifts gave the Action Committee total backing. (Cheeseman 1977: 60)

It is interesting that rather like my own analysis of narrative, Cheeseman feels more able to include details of division and tension within the community in these notes on the scenes than he overtly includes within the scene itself, and yet even here the focus is on the coming

together of the community by the end of the scene rather than the issues that led up to the meeting.

The lead protagonist of the scene is Ted, whose speeches carry much of the content of the narrative. Frank, a committee spokesman, introduces Ted and places the scene in context by describing the past events which have led to this point in the fight to save Shelton Bar. He does describe to us the volatile situation which has arisen within the workforce, primarily against the British Steel Corporation, who threaten to close down the works, but also between the employees and the action committee. Ted is at once placed in a position of having to attempt to identify himself with the men – ‘I know how you feel, because I’m tied to this mill as well as you are’, he says (38) – but he is also determined to drive home his beliefs in the action committee’s actions. Ted is a strong political orator and he carries the narrative forward by presenting facts with an emotional thrust. He calls on the men’s ‘responsibility’ towards each other and towards their community as a whole: ‘We’re charged with a responsibility, for 2,700 steelworkers and their families. 10,000 people in Stoke-on-Trent depend on you’ (38).

Ted’s speech suggests to the men that they are an isolated community and as such need to work together, in support of one another: ‘everybody relies on everybody else in a steel works’ (39). He calls on their longevity as a community, again identifying his own experience of life ‘on the Bar’ with theirs: ‘I’ve only worked here 20 years – it isn’t a good while to some of you’ (39), and calls on them individually to promote and encourage this identification: ‘Like Ernie there and Frank and Jack’ (39). Ted highlights the status which long service at the steel works brings with it. It becomes an issue of age-related hierarchy, similar to that which

Cheeseman creates at the Vic with his policy of paying higher wages the longer the performer stays with the company.

Ted further creates identification and belief in 'the community of the Bar' by linking them in their grief. He talks of those who have lost their lives in the works, saying, 'I've watched men give their lives for this industry' (39). He mentions one man whose sons are also employees at the steel works and who are present at his speech, making intergenerational links within the steel works and within this community. He then immediately describes the attempted closure of the works as 'murder by economics' (39) and 'economic genocide' (39). Ted's juxtaposition of 'giving a life' and 'having it taken away' are highly emotive, and the idea of genocide also highlights the intergenerational, communal suffering that Ted describes as taking place. Ted creates a narrative of an isolated 'community' (Shelton Bar), which has shared losses and shared goals. His aim is to persuade those workers whose jobs are not under threat to stand alongside their colleagues who will lose their livelihoods. He links the possible fate of the steelworks with that of the miners, thus again looking at them as a 'community' experiencing similar treatment to the miners' 'community'. It is against this narrative which Ted places his request to the men that they use what they have (the parts of the works which are not currently under threat), as 'a weapon' to fight against the proposed closures. He states: 'We could use that power now to keep this Works as one unit, but once you stand isolated... be alone... be apart (*he makes a gesture of hopelessness*)' (39). Ted, like Cheeseman, is recognising the need to create one homogenous 'community' within the Bar, he recognises that to isolate one part of the works or one part of the community means destruction of the whole.

Ted concludes his narrative by calling on the work-force to support one another and also places the idea of family into the equation, asking them to ‘show it to yourself and your family and your children that we are prepared to fight for Shelton Bar’ (39). Ted’s comment separates ‘family’ from ‘children’, highlighting a sense of part and whole within the notion of ‘family’. He would seem to be suggesting that the family comprises the older generations, rather than the younger, and uses ‘children’ as an intensifier for ‘family’.

The scene concludes with Frank summing up Ted’s narrative for the workforce: ‘You’ve heard Ted say what he’s got to say [...] are we go it alone as far as the mill or do we want to back Shelton as a whole to keep it a small community?’ (39). There follows a brief interrogation of the committee and Ted from two of the workers, who suggest that a meeting should have happened prior to the brochure being published. Ted’s response to this is to blame poor communication and the speed with which the brochure had to be prepared, and to ask the men if they are happy now that they have listened to him today. The response is that they are now happier and Ted is thanked for his time and for ‘the fact he’s come to put everything before us’ (40).

5.5.1 Shifting the Actuality

Much of the Mill scene was taken directly from a transcription of Ted’s speech but the rest of the scene had to be pieced together from the transcripts of the meeting and from subsequent interviews with the men involved. The main job for Cheeseman must have been

cutting the material down to a five minute scene, completing his 'ruthless, arbitrary, superficial tidying up' (Cheeseman as quoted in Thornber 1970).

The opening of the original transcript of the meeting sees Frank talking to the men, in far more depth than that shown in the final scene, about their fears that parts of the works will be shut imminently and the realisation that this has only just sunk in for many of the men. Should this have become a part of the final narrative it would have confused the narrative thread of the documentary as many of the men appear to be only just beginning to see the need to 'fight for Shelton Bar', when the action committee (who the documentary has been following), are actually coming towards the end of their fight and the play itself is thus coming towards its end. It would not fit with the narrative logic which Cheeseman has created by his juxtaposition of the fight scenes with the steel making process, as previously discussed. Narrative truth has been allowed to take precedent over historical truth.

5.5.2 Disagreement within the works

Ted's speech was also considerably longer than presented in the finished draft. He talks about a number of arguments and disagreements within the steel works and violent intimations from the workers and employees already leaving the steel works for safer jobs. Ted's personal feelings and the intergenerational impact of the closing of the steel works have also been excluded from either the first draft or cut from the final production.

The first script for the documentary misses out recorded conversations with the Mill men who felt that their jobs were not under threat and so did not need to join this fight to keep other parts of the steel works open. Ted describes the leaders of this group as ‘poisoners’ and they have described Ted as ‘touched by the IRA’ (Detailed abstract 33: 1). It is strong, antagonistic fighting talk. It can be argued, that was missed out for the reasons Woodruff (1995) describes above, as it highlighted divisions within the community. Linked with this is the analogy that is made between the steel-works fight and Dunkirk which has also been missed from the first draft. There are also several references within the original transcripts to other wider/national connections which the men of Shelton Bar have made in relation to their fight to keep the steel works open, including support from London, high-finance men and other unions. The importance of this national support was to make the men feel less isolated and yet it is this isolation which is highlighted within the final documentary and the other connections not alluded to. For Cheeseman the documentary was created to tell stories about the local community and not about national political issues.

5.5.3 Personal implications and intergenerational/age related issues.

Ted makes an impassioned personal plea to the men of Shelton Bar within the original detailed abstract that appears in the first draft of the documentary but has been cut from the finished version. He states: ‘nobody is going to walk over my history and my heritage and nobody’s going to stand in the way of development for our children and our future, and that’s what I want off you lads, support’ (first script: 8). In making these links with history and

heritage, future and children Ted highlights the intergenerational role which the steel works has played in the community from past generations and the hoped-for role which it will play in future generations. It is surprising that Cheeseman has cut this from the finished script as this was clearly an important issue for him. He states in the notes to the scenes

This is what the fight was for – to preserve a precious human institution that was harmonious and industrially efficient. This is the kind of works where there are often three generations of the same family working together, and a network of uncles, brothers, grandfathers, sons, sisters and brothers-in-law stretching across its 3,000 workers. (Cheeseman 1970: 51).

Whilst the steel works may not have been quite as ‘harmonious’ as Cheeseman paints it, there is no doubt that it was an intergenerational workplace where whole families worked and where whole families were at risk from its closure. Frank also links to Ted’s ideas of heritage and future plans in a section which is included in the first draft but cut from the finished version when he says, ‘I’m 63,[though other transcripts indicate he is 53] I’ve gone by the board, my redundancy pay’ll do me, I’m finished. What about you young ‘uns under 40. Have you got a future? Do you still want to work here?’ (first version: 7). Frank appears to be prepared to accept the loss of his own job. He is only 53 and yet in-terms of a working life in heavy industry he is no longer considered a young man and seems to be willing to move over for the younger generation; he can manage on the redundancy pay he will receive but he acknowledges that those under 40 will struggle and encourages them to fight for their own futures in the steel works. Ted goes on to talk about the use of emotion within meetings regarding the steel works and suggests that whilst he will be ‘cold calm and controlled’ (Detailed abstract 33) others will be ‘exploding’ and that this will have a dramatic impact on the meeting. He states

you've got responsible arguments being punched forwards and then all of a sudden emotion comes forward, and it drives 'em into the ground because none of 'em can face it. He lowered Melchett's eyes for 'im, he lowered Driscoll's eyes for 'im, and they all left looking round the table to see what they'd dropped, they couldn't face the family responsibilities as he'd put before 'em- and 10,000 people – thank you very much.

Ted suggest that a mixture of fact and emotion is necessary to win the argument and to make those on the opposing side feel the responsibility for the intergenerational damage they are causing to this community of 10,000 people. Again Cheeseman cut this from the finished documentary, possibly in an attempt to get a balance between emotion and 'fact'. This scene was presented as a 'meeting scene' and was possibly therefore aimed at reproducing the 'facts' of the fight to keep to the steel works open rather than the emotional impact which this would have on the workforce. It was an opportunity to see the historical truth rather than the narrative truth and as such Ted's emotive speeches did not fit, even with its intergenerational message.

5.6 Working round here: Stories from two of the original participants of *Fight for Shelton Bar!*

The juxtaposition of this following play with the textual source analyses mirrors Cheeseman's structural choices for *Fight for Shelton Bar!*: Like Cheeseman I intersperse historical truth with narrative truth. The following play is created from narrative interviews carried out with Albert Cooper and Ken Smith. The play highlights links between the Vic, the documentary, the steel works and the men's life-courses, focusing on themes of family (in

relation to personal families and the familial community of Shelton bar steel works), ageing, intergenerational issues and community in relation to place and history.

Albert Cooper and Kenneth Smith both worked for many years in Shelton Bar Steel Works, beginning as school leavers and remaining there throughout their working lives until retirement. Albert, who is 68, was very involved in the fight to keep Shelton Bar open and became involved in the Vic documentary. This involvement led to a close and lasting relationship (involving his entire family) with the Victoria and New Victoria theatres and with Cheeseman, which forms part of the play. Kenneth (Ken) is 66 and was a trade union representative at the time of the dispute; he was not, however, a member of the Action Committee and therefore was not as involved in the Vic's documentary though he was very aware of its taking place. His involvement with the Vic and New Vic theatre has also been far less than Albert's but it does appear to have had an impact on his life-course. The different levels of involvement are discussed as part of the analysis of narrative. Cheeseman makes an appearance within this play though his lines are minimal and come only from Albert's interview. In presenting Peter in this way the audience view him through Albert's eyes rather than through his own words, thus offering an alternative and more subjective view of the man than seen through the first play.

The characters of Ken and Albert are played by four actors, two to represent the younger selves and two to represent the men at the ages they currently are. The older and younger characters observe one another on stage and can often be seen in relation to one another; In this way I explore the temporal nature of identities across the life-course,

suggesting that 'identity can only be understood as process. As "being" or "becoming"' (Jenkins 1996: 4). I am physically drawing the audience's attention to the life experience of the characters, to the fact that this is a story about two individuals' experiences of getting older, of living a life within specific environments, which in this case are Stoke-on-Trent, Shelton Bar Steel Works and to some extent, for both, The Vic theatre. Albert's wife Glenys is included in the cast though she was not interviewed due to ill health. Her words are taken from Albert's narratives. Ted Smith, who features heavily in the previous textual source analysis also appears briefly in the play, again played by an actor of the age Ted was at the time of the Fight to save Shelton. Ted is no longer alive, but his presence on stage within this play highlights the major role he played in the fight to keep Shelton steel works open as well as his major role as a source for *Fight for Shelton Bar!* His words are reported ones, taken from Ken's interview. Polly is also present within this cast as she was within Ken's narratives and, as mentioned earlier, becomes a connecting strand through the chapter.

As the audience enter the stage floor is criss-crossed with red lights creating lines on the floor which appear to be channels down which the light is flowing. The sound effects of a steel works pouring out molten iron and steel are loud throughout the audience's entrance and get louder as the house lights fade out.

Albert 1 (the younger) enters from UC, Ken 1 (the younger) enters DL; they see each other and Albert lifts his pipe in recognition while Ken raises his clip board, and they carefully cross to CS avoiding the red lines. They stand CS and mime shouting to one another.

Albert 2 (the elder) enters down the CR audience stairs and stops half way down. Ken 2 (the elder) enters CL stairs and stops half way

down. The sound effects quieten but can still be heard in the background.

Ken 2: First of all,

When the British Steel Corporation took over

We were asked to organise into Trade Unions,

And none of us were really particularly inclined that way,

If you like,

But the British Steel Corporation said

They would only negotiate on wages and conditions with trade unions,

Er.

Me and my colleagues

– you’ve already spoken to Albert Cooper –

Ken 2 gestures to Albert 2 who takes out his pipe in recognition

Ken 2: We were the grammar school boys,

The high school boys

Who’d come into the laboratory,

And we were being trained up

To go into the management structure at some stage.

As I say,

We weren’t particularly union-minded,

But we formed into this,

And I for my sins was elected secretary, you see.

Ted Smith enters UC and beckons Ken 1 to him. They move UC

Ken 1: Ted Smith called us all together,

In the canteen,

And Said

Ted : The writings on the wall for Shelton.

I've heard that there are going to be closures of large parts of Shelton.

We should form a committee

To fight for the future of Shelton Bar.

Ted and Ken shake hands and Ted exits UC

Ken 1 returns to Albert 1 CS

Ken1: I think they wanted a thinker in there,

And I knew that Albert Cooper was particularly good at English

And he was a thinker

And he was a planner.

Ken 2: So I went back to Albert and said,

you know,

Ken 1: Would you like to get involved

In the committee

That's been formed to fight for Shelton Bar?

Ken 2: And Albert said

Albert 1: Yes.

Albert 1 and Ken 1 shake hands and begin to exit, Albert UC and Ken
DL

Ken 2: And he then got very heavily involved in it.

He was their treasurer,

If you like,

He was almost the number one.

Certainly he worked hard with Ted Smith

For the fight for Shelton Bar.

The lights change and the sound effects change to those of a ticking clock and other household noises. Ken 2 and Albert 2 move onto the stage and then exit DR. They return with two easy chairs which they place DC. They exit and Albert 1 (the younger) enters carrying a small table which he places between the chairs and sits in the chair lighting/cleaning his pipe.

Glenys enters DR to top of Vom

Glenys: Tea, Albert?

Albert: Lovely. (he lifts his pipe in agreement and adjusts the small table)

Glenys enters with a tray full of cakes and pastries and tea which she places on the small table between the chairs. She then sits and begins to pour tea and dish out cakes for herself and Albert 1.

During this Albert 2 (the elder) enters on the DC steps and stops half way.

Albert 2: I'd heard of the theatre,

Of course,

The Vic, erm,

As everyone had, erm,

I'd never been.

Erm.

I thought of it as, erm, medicine,

You know,

Good for you but not very palatable,

Very worthy – you know, erm,

And Peter Cheeseman contacted us for Shelton Bar

And he was very interested in

Looking at the fight for the works

Which was on at the time, erm,

For one of his documentaries,

Which the lads were quite keen about because it meant possibly more

Publicity –

I was a bit wary of it.

That's how I got started.

For some reason Peter took a shine to me and kept in touch,

And he had this dream of a new theatre,

Which I think he had the day he moved into the old Vic, Hartshill. -

I think he'd got this –

Well, I know he'd got this idea that the community,

That overused word,

That local people should be involved,

Erm, and you know that Peter was a very determined man,
And so he kept in touch.

Albert 1 has had his tea poured and is drinking it. He takes out a letter
from his jacket pocket and shows it to Glenys

Albert 1: Do you want the good news or the bad news?

Albert 2: I'll always remember –

Glenys: Tell me the good news

Albert 1: We're invited to the theatre – first night,

We're invited by the Director.

I'll put me suit on.

Glenys: And the bad news is?

Albert 1: It's Shakespeare

Albert and Glenys exit DSR and then re-appear with coats on
taking them off and hanging them on pegs attached to the DSR
vom wall during the next speech

Albert 2: So we went,

And it was terrific, absolutely terrific,

And we were amazed.

Glenys, dear Glenys –

Who's now not with me,

You know,

She's got Alzheimer's –

Neither of us were particularly arty types,

In fact, not at all,

And we were both bowled over by it;

We thought it was great.

Albert 1: So you know we came home and said

'So that's what Shakespeare's all about',

You know.

I thought it was all bullshit that arty people talked about,

You know, erm,

And of course it isn't,

And that sort of got me more interested in the theatre as a theatre

And Peter kept on pulling the strings,

He was very good at that, erm,

And I got more and more involved, of course.

Peter enters with a typewriter with paper in it; Albert and Glenys greet Peter. Glenys beckons Peter to sit in one of the easy chairs and offers the tea and cakes. She takes the typewriter from Peter, and Albert exits DR then returns immediately with a table and chair which he places CS and Glenys puts the typewriter on it and sits.

Albert sits in the easy chair next to Peter and pours them both tea and offers cakes.

Albert 1: I suppose it was because of Peter's character.

He'd got this tremendous ability to lead people,

He'd got this, I don't know...

He wasn't an easy man, of course.

A great man,

Who became a great friend, of course.

And I was used to having me own way,

You know,

I was in management at British Steel,

But I was quite happy to follow Peter;

He was a bit like the Pied Piper really,

Except he wasn't manipulative at all,

Erm... it was just his sort of this clear, passion,

I suppose,

For what he wanted.

His utter integrity,

Which always shone through, er,

And he was dead straight,

You know,

There was no bullshit about Peter at all.

Glenys is now typing away busily

Albert 2: Luckily, Glenys, poor Glen,

Who was one of the great unsung heroes of that campaign,

Was able to participate with me,
Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to spend so much time.
I was drawn into it
Until in the end
I was on all three trusts;
I was secretary of all three trusts at one time,
With meetings almost every night of the week,
Either meetings or events or activities,
Whatever,
And it was two jobs, erm,
It was literally two jobs.

Albert 1 moves from Peter to Glenys taking her a cup of tea

Albert 1: It was quite difficult, really.

We set up the typewriter in the front room

And Glenys used to have always hundreds of letters.

Glenys finishes typing a letter and pulls it off the typewriter, she separates the carbons and gives three to Albert, keeping one. Albert smiles at her and takes the copies over to Peter, giving him one.

Albert 1: Four carbons;

Peter insisted that everything that went out had carbon to him.

Actually, you know,

It was very unusual

Because Peter actually trusted me to do that at home.

Peter has just finished his cake

Peter: This is a scoffer's paradise!

He stands and moves over to Glenys holding the carbon in the air
by way of thanks to Glenys, shakes hands with Albert, waves to
Glenys and exits DR

Albert 1: You know that Peter's reputation

Was that he needed to know what colour the toilet paper was.

Every mortal thing in that theatre he needed to know about,

Which I suppose was a great thing

In some ways

Because his character then imbued that whole place, er,

But in other ways,

In some ways,

People used to tear their hair.

Albert goes to the DSR vom and puts his coat on. Glenys continues
typing.

Albert 1: So we were either doing letters at home

Or round at the Vic,

Having meetings or whatever,

And even if I was at a meeting,

They usually finished at about nine o'clock,

So Glenys could come round to see me afterwards,

So we'd have a drink in the bar
 And meet the actors
 And we got to know everyone,
 Erm, so there was a sort of a social life as well,
 A good social life,
 And it completely changed my life,
 Utterly changed my life.
 Hopefully,
 I think it changed my values a little,
 You know,
 I was less sort of materialistic and, er –
 It certainly –
 I met some very interesting people,
 I made lifelong friends who still keep in touch.
 Er, and Glenys was involved with me up to the neck.

Glenys stops typing and moves to Albert who helps her put her coat on. They exit DR

The furniture is cleared and the stage lighting changes back to the steel plant with the red lights and the sound effects of machinery etc.

Ken 1 (the younger) enters UC with a young woman who is Polly Warren. He shows her around the stage carefully avoiding the red lines.

Ken 1: As far as the Fight for Shelton Bar! is concerned

My memories of that were really Polly Warren,

I think her name was.

She came along

And I remember taking her around the works,

She got a flavour for the place.

Erm, it's a strange mixture;

It was very old and very modern.

Polly exits UC and immediately re-appears above the UC Vom on a platform, she has removed her coat

Ken1: They went away and did the play,

The Fight for Shelton Bar!,

As Ken says this four banners in red and white with Fight for Shelton Bar! on them unfurl above the audience DC,CR, CL and UC

Ken 1: Which was excellent.

The thing I remember particularly in it

Was Polly Warren's song

'We're Shelton Men'.

And I can almost remember the words to it.—

Ken moves to an empty seat in the front row of the audience and sits

Polly: (sings the chorus of 'Fight for Shelton Bar')

We're Shelton men, we're not afraid, we've got our dignity.

We'll fight and win the battle, boys, against the BSC,

They may be strong and powerful but that won't get them far,

For we are all united now to fight for Shelton Bar!

Ken 1: It was very good. –

I just marvelled at how clever the producers and the writers were,

To sort of capture the interesting

Or what they thought were the important parts

Of what were happening.

It was sort of captured;

It was almost like seeing a tape recording of work.

It was extremely well done;

It was something new to me then.

Those who were involved at the time couldn't see the wood for the trees,

We couldn't see the larger picture

And it was nice for someone,

An academic,

To come in from the outside and,

You know,

Capture those moments if you like.

Ken1 stands and walks around the stage carefully avoiding the
red lines but aware of them as if for the first time

It's very difficult,

On the stage,
 To show what a steelwork's like;
 You can have big burly men swearing
 And having meetings and so on,
 But how do you show what a steelwork's like?
 And they actually had a series of red lights that came on,
 They were projected from the ceiling I think,
 But they were projected onto the floor,
 In sequence,
 And it was almost as if iron was running across the floor,
 It was very, very well done,
 Very cleverly done.
 I remember that.

Ken 2 (the elder) has entered via the DC steps and stands half
 way down the steps

Ken 2: That iron running across the floor.
 We walked past the blast furnace each day,
 The sight of molten iron running along the floor
 And a thousand bonfire nights was nothing.
 We thought nothing of it
 And to an outsider—
 Goodness – that's amazing –

It's a picture that people don't see every day,
 So, you know, people,
 Outside people,
 Could see those things.

The lights change; we are in the theatre. Ken 1 and Ken 2 exit
 Albert 2 (the elder) enters UC through the audience and stands on the
 platform above the UC Vom. He is working his pipe.

Albert 2: I've always smoked a pipe and they'd spotted that, of course,
 And at work I always smoke these things
 (points to pipe in mouth)
 Little aluminium things, erm,
 These don't need pipe cleaners and stuff,
 And at home,
 I used to smoke a briar,
 Always smoked a proper briar at home,
 Which I like.
 And of course on the first night
 I went down with me briar,
 Because you could in those days,
 You could smoke,
 And Peter saw me before the show
 And he said

'Oh, you've got the wrong pipe'.

It's amazing,

That kind of detail,

And of course they'd been out,

They'd been out and they'd got exactly the same pipe

From wherever, for this actor,

Who didn't smoke,

Just had quick puff, you know.

It's incredible, isn't it?

So it was very realistic, I thought.

They didn't try to imitate.

Albert 1 enters UC underneath Albert 2

Albert 1: I was very comfortable with it,

Very comfortable.

Glenys was a bit, erm –

Embarrassed –

Maybe not embarrassed, but,

She,

They took one of her speeches

And Romy played my wife,

Romy Saunders,

Who became Mrs C, erm,
And there was one speech
Where she said something like, er,
'Shelton Bar, Shelton Bar bought my house, Shelton Bar did this –'
She never worked there.
It was a powerful little piece, that.
I enjoyed it enormously and
It certainly got me interested in the theatre.

Glenys enters UC and Albert takes her arm.

Albert 1: It became then our,
Virtually,
It was our only social life,
It was almost –
It wasn't obsessive,
But it was, you do,
You know what I'm trying to say,
We got trapped by it, or...
Because it was such a huge part of our lives,
It was a second job.
And even the kids,
They started to call it 'the good old' and then 'the good old Vic'
'Oh you're going down to the good ol', the good ol' Vic'.

You know the kids;
They were fine with it, you know,
She would never neglect the kids, you know,
But 'Mmm, oh that's where you're off to',
And they were even serving at the sweet shop at times
Or in the coffee bar,
So it became a kind of family thing in a way,
You know, the two girls.
Albert 2: We knew one day it would end,
Of course,
Which in effect it has, –
And that we'd have to then build a new social life because –
Glen's got Alzheimer's now anyway,
(A coughs), erm.
So, yes, it was a bit dangerous, really,
And we knew it was,
But there was no alternative, really,
Because we had to get the work done
I suppose it was because of the way Peter was,
He had a way,
I don't know if you remember,
He sort of trusted particular people.

I don't know,
 But he had an inordinate amount of trust and faith in me,
 And there are plenty of people
 Who could have done what I did,
 Plenty of people,
 But you know how Peter is,
 'Only Albert could',
 And because of that you get drawn in more
 And more
 And more.

Peter enters UC and moves to Glen and Albert CS. They all shake hands and Peter looks around the theatre as if to say goodbye

Albert 2: When Peter retired I said to him:

Albert 1: I'm going to step down from the trust

Peter: No, no, you mustn't;

It's very important that we keep continuity

Throughout the years.

Albert nods. They shake hands again and Peter exits DL

Albert 1: And I'd say he's right in many ways,

That continuity is important,

That people know –

'Well we've tried that before, it didn't work.'

But, then again,

You can be seen by new trust members as

'Oh that boring old fart,

He thinks he knows it all'.

So, er, its difficult, isn't it?

So Peter persuaded me I'd stay on the trust

For a few years after he'd retired.

Gradually withdrew from those activities;

We gradually stopped fundraising.

We wound it down,

Slowly, slowly, slowly.

Peter runs back onto the stage from DL with keys in his hands
and some gardening implements.

Peter: I've seen this allotment;

I've taken it on,

I've taken it on.

He shows drawings to Albert and pulls Albert and Glen towards DL

Albert 2: And then we got involved with the allotment.

That was Peter again,

Of course.

I thought,

'Oh, not again!'

Albert, Peter and Glenys exit DL together looking at the drawings
Ken1 (the younger enters) UC

Ken 1: As a child we used to go to the Victoria Cinema,
Which was in Hartshill,
I used to live two to three hundred yards from it,
And then it became –
For want of a better term –
A gentleman's club,
Not very gentlemanly, but...
And then the theatre company came along.
It was called the Vic theatre company,
And I could see all the bright red and white posters outside of it,
And the Vic was born.
It was quite strange
To go to theatre-in-the-round.
It was new then.
It was something new to us
And it was quite strange.
I think I really started going to The Vic
When the Fight for Shelton Bar! came.
It was interesting to see what was happening to that site.
It had been a place of entertainment for a long time.

Ken 2 has entered DC steps and stopped part way down

Ken 1: As a colleague of Albert's

I got roped in for various things.

I remember in the early 80s

Marathons were all the rage

And everyone was running marathons,

And the Stoke Marathon was enormous,

And I actually took part in it

But I ran in a Victoria theatre vest

And the money I raised went to the Victoria theatre.

At other times we've been to the Newcastle Carnival,

And I've been dressed up

By the theatre

In Victorian costume

And we've gone round

And tried to raise money

And raise the profile of the theatre.

So we got involved,

I suppose,

As a direct result of the play in the first place.

Ken 2 (the elder): We do go out to the theatre but not very—

Not as often as we used to do—

I suppose because of time constraints;

We've got grandchildren now, –

And you know

I'm in lots of things:

I'm a governor at the High School,

I'm in the Endonian society,

I'm on the Endon Well Dressing Committee, erm.

We've got three grandchildren,

We babysit a lot and there are a lot of –

I've got a lot of time constraints, if you like.

There are a lot of other theatres now:

Manchester is fairly close,

We get up to Manchester

And we go to opera there

And musicals in particular.

I've been down to London quite a lot.

My daughter trained at the Royal College of Music and Drama in Cardiff,

She's a flautist

And we got pulled down into Cardiff quite a lot,

And I've been to lots of things in the Millennium Centre in Cardiff

Or at St David's Hall,

Through Catherine

We have a lot to do with theatre and the arts

But away from Stoke-on-Trent.

I try and get my grandchildren to go and see the Christmas play

At the theatre,

Because they are much better than pantomime

And I find

They are intellectually quite stimulating for them.

I think they enjoy them better than pantomime,

You know pantomime has got its place of course.

So the love of the theatre has rubbed off a little.

I knew little about it before.

Ken exits and the lights change to highlight the floor cloth DL
which is painted as a garden (the allotment)

Albert 1 enters DL with Peter, they have a bench which they place
CS, a wheelbarrow and some pots and begin to place pots around
the DL 'allotment area' and fill with soil etc.

Albert 1 (the younger): It was a big allotment

And that took an awful lot of time,

And we were very keen,

And we were going to do this and we were going to do that,

And it was going to be organic,

And we've got to have this,

And we'll have a pond,

And you know. And it was just a tip;
 It was a dreadful place when we took it over,
 And I'd got certain visions and Peter had got visions,
 And I thought we were bound to clash,
 But we didn't,
 We didn't. It was strange,
 I thought we'd fall out over that but we didn't.
 We sort of rubbed along very nicely
 And created that garden
 And that took a lot of time,
 Er, so that helped
 And that was immediately after his retirement anyway.

Albert 2 (the elder) has entered on the CL steps and watches the action. During the next speech Glenys enters DL with a thermos flask and sandwiches for both men. She places them on the bench, looks around the allotment and waves to Albert and exits DL

Albert 2: So that was building up,
 And then Glen became ill a few years later,
 It took over me life, of course, which it would.

Albert has moved to sit on the bench CS for the end of the proceeding speech. Peter is still busy planting and potting

Albert 1: Peter would never give up, you know.
 Even though he'd got his Parkinsons, you know.

He would never give up.

His tenacity –

Bloody mindedness sometimes –

You know what Peter was like, erm.

A few weeks before he died, erm,

He was out in his wheelchair,

He couldn't barely walk then,

Romy'd taken him out for a walk

And you know his sort of mental faculties were declining,

Which I found terribly difficult to cope with, erm,

Particularly after Glenys, you know.

Albert noticeably pulls himself together and moves from the bench to join Peter in the 'allotment'. They are clearly enjoying themselves and working hard

Albert 2: (from steps CL) Anyway,

And they were going past,

They were walking past the allotment gate,

Peter's in his wheelchair

And he wants to go in the allotment.

Romy says 'I haven't got me key.

I haven't got the allotment key, the gate key.'

So he's out of his wheelchair,

He could barely walk and he's climbing up the gate,

Trying to climb over the gate.
If he had managed to reach the top of the gate
He'd have tumbled over and fallen
Cos he couldn't manipulate himself properly.
She managed to hold him back,
Determined,
'No, I want to go and see the allotment',
Until luckily a neighbour came past
And saw the predicament and, er,
Said 'I'll stay here with Peter, you go and get the key'.
But that's Peter all over,
He was driven.
He wasn't going to give up
And I admire him for it;
He was not one to.
He had a terrible illness,
He was falling over all the time,
He was covered in blood.
No, he was going to carry on;
He wasn't going to sit down
And mope
And feel sorry for himself.

Albert 1: Even though he could be blunt and dismissive,
 Rude, bloody rude, very rude,
 But he was mostly charming and inspiring and
 Had a genuine care for people
 And it was genuine.

Albert and Peter tidy the allotment and exit DL Albert 2 watches
 them exit and then exits himself through the auditorium via the
 steps

The lights change to the Shelton Bar lighting and sound effects of
 the steel works begin again

Ken 1(the younger) enters and stands CS

Ken1: I remember in later years,
 I was a manager at Shelton Bar and amongst other things
 I was responsible for health and safety.
 I remember
 We had to fill in the ethnic makeup of the workforce and
 We'd got quite a big work force at that time,
 And I remember thinking,
 At that time,
 That although we had people from all over the world,
 We had Polish people,
 We had Jamaican people, erm,
 We'd got some Sikhs.
 But a lot of our people weren't from ethnic backgrounds

And I sort of looked into that at the time
To find out why
And looking at our recruitment policy,
Our recruitment policy had been
That father worked at Shelton Bar,
Maybe his brother did
And when son got up to working age
He would walk up to the office and say
'Is there any job for me son?'
And if father was a good worker
They would take son on,
And if son was late for work a few mornings
They wouldn't tell him off,
They would have a word with the father –
'Your son was late for work yesterday,
Would you have a word with him?',
You know,
And because it was family-orientated like that it seemed to work
And it was fine for the families who were there,
But I suppose for the larger communities
It was unfair
In that they didn't all get an equal opportunity to get a job there,

If you like.

It's just the way it worked.

And everyone knew each other,

And they could cover for each other,

And if uncle couldn't make it on Friday night,

To work,

For some reason,

Maybe his brother would take his place in the production line

And get paid for it,

You see.

But, erm, it seemed to work

And the foreman would take on people they could rely on.

That only changed in more recent times

Because of government legislation.

Ken 2 has entered via the steps SR and stands half way down.

Ken 2: I started in 1960

And I virtually put the light out, erm.

I was going to take early retirement and

I was taken on one side

And told it was going to close

But I mustn't say anything,

Which I didn't,

And then the announcement was made
And it closed in April 2000,
And then I stayed on until the June
Making places safe
And getting it ready for the demolition people,
Working with the estates people.
It was quite sad;
It was good in many ways.
It becomes part of your life,
It's a 24-hour job and, erm,
Now I can go past it,
The place has been developed,
There isn't any Shelton Bar there and, er,
You know,
All that's left is history.
But if it was still working
I'd find a great desire to go and see how things were.

Ken 1 moves the UC Vom and gestures to Ken 2 then up to the ceiling and the lights are turned out. Both exit.
Curtain call.

5.7 Analysis of Narrative

The creation of the above play again focused my attention on thematic strands running through the narratives. The themes of love and family were very strongly focused in Albert's narrative and were picked up within Ken's stories of the familial community which existed within Shelton Bar steel works. Ken's narratives also picked up on the theme of intergenerational cohesion and the passing on of knowledge from one generation to another, again focused through notions of family, community and the steel works. The Vic theatre and the Arts in general also became a part of this theme linking family and intergenerational relationships to the Vic through both Ken and Albert's stories. Both participants' narratives extend understandings of community in relation to history and place, continuity and connectedness, identifying the theatre and the steel work as central to these understandings. The section concludes with a review of the process of making this play, focusing on the impact of the researcher/participant relationship.

Albert's story is a love story between himself, his wife, the Victoria Theatre and Cheeseman. His life-course has been shifted and moulded by his involvement with Cheeseman and the theatre, with the starting point being *Fight for Shelton Bar!* The documentary process and performance allowed Albert and Glenys to enter a different world which they initially felt uninterested and even slightly antagonistic towards. Their understanding of the Vic and of theatre in general was shaped by the documentary and then by Cheeseman who encouraged a further involvement from the two, seeing in Albert something which he could identify with and he felt a need for at the theatre. It was Albert who Cheeseman turned to for support in order to

make his vision of a new theatre into a reality and it was Albert and Glenys (along with a large amount of other willing volunteers, including Ken) who raised the money to get the New Vic theatre built. It was also Albert who Peter turned to in retirement when he was looking for a new challenge and a partner to share that with. Family becomes a part of this love theme, with the involvement of Glenys and their children in supporting the theatre. Albert's love for his wife is an enduring one, one which has seen them through raising a family and taking on a second job with all of the work that they did for the theatre. Glenys's ageing is linked to a sad decline into Alzheimer's and subsequent move to a care home which has meant that their relationship has altered. Albert makes links between Glenys's declining health and Cheeseman's health related decline into older age. Although Albert is clearly affected by this decline narrative he does not focus on it; instead his narratives focus on the key role Glenys played at the Vic. It is important for Albert to look back, when he talks of Glenys, and recall the younger woman she was before her illness and to focus on the fighting spirit which Peter exhibited even when in the final stages of his illness.

The theme of family continues through Ken's narratives and becomes a source of reflection on the intergenerational, with the Vic as the catalyst. He talks of his daughter's involvement in the Arts and links this to his own involvement in the Arts, discussing how this has become less localised as he has aged. He also talks of passing his knowledge of and love for theatre to his grandchildren in a desire to educate them. For Ken the idea of passing knowledge across generations is very important and becomes a theme running throughout his narratives. As well as extending the theme of family and education forward to future generations, Ken reminisces about the importance of family to his own childhood. He expresses a sense of loss at

the demolition of the terraced streets and of what he perceives to be a loss of the close-knit, family-based community in which people knew their neighbours and problems and disagreements could be sorted immediately by the family. I have not included this part of Ken's story in the play because the scenes are set primarily within the Shelton steel works. A further reason for not including this important part of the narrative was the starting point that Ken chose for his story: the beginning of the fight to keep Shelton Bar open. It became difficult to move backwards in time to Ken's life prior to employment at the Bar; this, I felt, was part of another play. I had found, like Cheeseman, that even relevant and interesting parts of the narrative would not 'fit' into the entire narrative shape of the drama. This idea of a familial community was reflected, however, in Ken's comments about the hiring process at the Bar, which incorporated a similar sense of family and community, found within the Shelton Bar works. The extended, and often intergenerational, family of the worker took on a communal responsibility to ensure that the work was carried out effectively and that the bigger community of the Bar was not made to suffer. However Ken is also very aware of the potential problems with this – the way that one 'community' excludes another.

Ken describes his role within the extended familial community of the Bar as one of privilege; his job allowed him access to most of the works and he was accepted by each separate section within it: 'We could go and get a cup of tea in every department in the place[...] It was nice, it was a nice atmosphere.' For Ken the feelings of being an accepted and an integral part of a familial community are important, his stories of living in Stoke echo similar feelings: 'You know we weren't latch key children, but if you came home and by some chance mum and father weren't in you just went to Aunty Dorothy's next door, erm. Everyone looked

after everyone else'. Ken went on to illustrate this familial feeling within the steel works by describing a winter when electricity supplies ran out and the workers had to find alternative ways of generating power to keep the steel plant operational. This narrative was not included in the play. My own exclusions and edits are strategic in foregrounding the topic of ageing. In doing this I produce a kind of mirror image of the Cheeseman effect.

Ken's involvement as a governor of the nearby High School continues his link to, and belief in, education, which is also highlighted by his desire for his grandchildren to see the Vic Christmas production for its ability to 'intellectually stimulate'. Ken's life-course and ageing process would appear to have continued and supported his youthful beliefs and understanding of the importance of education in his own sense-making process. He chooses to tell his audience – in the case of our interview his audience was clearly me and possibly the academic world to which Ken saw me as belonging; in the case of the play the audience alters to the reader of this work, which remains, quite probably, within the academic world – about his grammar-school education and that he was being groomed for management. It has played an important part throughout his life-course, having gained him a fast track to management in the first place. The theme of education also comes through Albert's narratives; education of himself and his wife into the theatre (and Shakespeare). He also links education to a sense of continuity with the old passing down their knowledge to the young, the young generation learning from them – Albert points out the pitfalls to this and alternative ways of viewing this knowledge transfer across the generations.

The idea of 'continuity and connectedness' (Hockey and James 2003) fits closely with Ken's narratives throughout the play and throughout his life-course. He has only encountered minor fragmentation and sequestration across his life-course. At the end of our meeting, after the tape recorder was turned off, Ken talked about feeling he had not been able to form links with the community in which he lives during his working life, due to his long working hours and involvement at Shelton Bar. He discussed making an effort to achieve this community involvement since retiring. It is possibly this lack of a local community during his working life, this lack of a feeling of connectedness, which makes 'the family' of Shelton Bar so important to him and thus so difficult to let go of. It is only the transition into retirement and the fact that the community of Shelton Bar no longer exists, and the location has been re-developed, which has allowed Ken the freedom to move on and find involvement within a new community setting.

Ken's narratives also link family and community to period/time and to *Fight for Shelton Bar!* His thoughts have been triggered by watching a video documentary about Shelton Bar by Ray Johnson, which is set very firmly in the 1970s. The images have influenced Ken and seem to have stayed in his thoughts during our interview. He has linked the period of the video both backwards and forwards in his mind, taking him back to his childhood in Stoke when he grew up close to the Vic and then moved to the area surrounding Stoke station to live in a close-knit working-class community with his father, step-mother and her family. Ken's image of community life in Stoke as a child may well be a rose-tinted one; McKibbin summarised the general pattern of neighbourhood ties in British working-class communities during the 1950s:

Relationships with neighbours were more complicated [than family ties], and the common belief that there was much 'popping in and out', though not exactly untrue, is largely romantic. [...] Unless people had known each other for many years, relations with neighbours tended to be superficial, and women rarely kept up with neighbours if either of them moved. There is much evidence that people were suspicious of their neighbours and large numbers thought them untrustworthy (1998 : 181).

However true or false Ken's memories may be, he has carried this imagined community with him throughout his life-course and sought to reproduce it. He has been fortunate to be in a social and economic position which has enabled him to achieve 'elective belonging' (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005) rather than the 'social exclusion' which some of the Shelton Bar steel workers faced after the closure of parts of the works. Ken links the community feelings he encountered as a child with his working life at Shelton Bar and his experiences of this work community and its feelings of family, respect and reliability.

It is Ken's sense of belonging to a location as well as a community which first links him to the Vic theatre. He is very interested in the Vic, initially because it is located in a venue with which he has grown up. He has watched the venue metamorphose from a cinema to a 'gentleman's club' to a theatre-in-the-round during the early part of his life-course, and has then seen the theatre shift to a new location without the same historical meanings which the old location held for him. (It is interesting that the location of the Vic seems to play a big part in a number of participants' stories and the shift from old theatre to new, whilst it was a huge achievement, seems to have left most participants with a sense of loss as well as any sense of achievement.)

Ken's narratives of the steel works show a similar shifting and development of the community during his life-course. The world of Shelton Bar moved away from local insular employment strategies and due to greater efficiency as well as the closures forced onto the works by British Steel in the 1970s, it reduced its employee numbers drastically. Ken shows pride in the great efficiency of the works and surprisingly does not talk of a loss of the family/community feel, just a different size and makeup of that community. Ken was still able to be a central part of this community; he could elect to remain within it rather than being isolated from it, which allows him to feel comfortable with this shift. It is interesting to contrast this with Steve's narratives of the life-course of the Vic, which are presented in Chapter Six of this thesis, and the differences which occurred there especially after the move to the new building in which Steve saw the shift within the community/family as a significant loss even though he was still a central figure within the new community.

5.7.1 Reflections on Process

In order to further open up my working practices and show not only the 'findings' but the process of 'finding the findings' which, as Reimann (2003) states, is often invisible in biographical research, leading to risks of misunderstanding, misrepresentation and even self-misunderstandings (Apitzsch and Inowlocki 2000), I now go onto discuss the creation of *Working round here: Stories from two of the original participants of Fight for Shelton Bar!*

The play begins with Ken's story. When I met with Ken he was keen to start at what he considered to be the beginning of his story relating to Shelton Bar. He had done quite a lot of

pre-planning prior to the interview, deciding what his story was and where it needed to begin. Ken was keen to offer a story which would be of interest and value to me as a researcher because he felt his own narrative in relation to the production and production process was brief.

I found the interview with Ken one of the hardest I conducted; this is likely to stem from the lack of personal connection that Ken and I had. For most of my interviews I had an immediate link with my participant, that being a mutual working knowledge of the Vic theatre and of Cheeseman. For Ken this was not a particularly relevant connection. Ken made a number of references during his interview which highlighted this lack of connection but he also made a number of attempts to create/enhance any connections we had. The age difference between myself and my participant has not felt like a hurdle during any interviews, quite possibly because we have had other connections; however, with Ken I was aware that he referred indirectly to my age on a couple of occasions, stating that I wouldn't remember an event or occasion. Ken felt it was his role to teach me about the past and to present me with a narrative picture of Stoke from the 1950s to the present day. He was, in a way, passing on stories to the next generation, just as Cheeseman intended the documentaries to do. Not being an insider researcher clearly impacted on this interview. Ken felt a need to take control and the power-balance of the relationship shifted. Although uncomfortable for me at the time, this was a sharing of power of which I am in favour, and which seemed to produce a very thick personal narrative that was embedded in time and place.

Albert was one of the people I knew from my own time at the Vic. He was often at the theatre in meetings with Peter, or he could be found looking around the place with pipe in mouth. At the time I had no idea that he had worked at Shelton Bar, or that his involvement with the Vic had stemmed from *Fight for Shelton Bar!* I only became aware of this connection when I began this research. Prior to our interview I was also unaware that Albert's wife, Glenys (who was also a regular feature of the Vic during my time there), was suffering from Alzheimer's and had been in a home for some time. Albert's story took a new direction in my mind and as I read the transcript of the interview the narrative structure of the play began to shape itself.

Albert's life-course, ageing and intergenerational relationships have been extensively shaped and shifted by his involvement with the Vic and with the documentary *Fight for Shelton Bar!* It is perhaps with this in mind that I focused on Albert's love affair with his wife as well as with the Vic; I wanted to ensure that the audience saw him as a 'real person' and not just as a prime example of someone whose life has been turned upside down by their involvement with the theatre. Ken was a participant whose involvement with the Vic has had far less impact on his life-course and ageing. I felt that juxtaposing Ken and Albert's stories would offer alternative views of the impact that the theatre has had on their life-courses.

Ken's recollections of *Fight for Shelton Bar!* include Polly Warren's song which summed up the fighting spirit which existed within the works at the time. He is keen to retain images of the past which seem to encapsulate for him the era and place. Ken recollects other arts events at the time which are not included in the play, such as the video documentary which he later

asked me to view with him, as well as bronze statues, made at the time, of steel men. It is important for Ken to emphasise his recollection of these other arts events which possibly hold more meaning for him now than the documentary *Fight for Shelton Bar!* For Ken, his recollections of the production are vague and held in memory only, whereas the tape and the bronze statue, which he has a copy of, are solid reminders and not only brought alive through reminiscence. This idea of solid reminders links to Polly's interview comments about the archive which she sees as a solid reference point and resource for past and future generations. It is the importance of retaining a community's history in not only the production but all of the notes, tapes and research material which went along with the production, which led Cheeseman to archive this material in such depth and detail. Polly Warren is very much at the centre of Ken's recollections of *Fight for Shelton Bar!* He recalls the song mentioned above and her visit to the steel works during the documentary creation process. In the first play 'Rounding up the Ladies for the Company', Polly described herself as 'incongruous'. It is possibly because of her incongruous presence – this person from another world – that Ken's recollections of the production revolve around her.

One aspect of the original documentary which Ken recalled quite vividly was that of the blast furnaces and the recreation of the molten iron running across the floor. He describes the blast furnaces as 'a thousand bonfire nights', moving out of his usual factual language to describe the image he holds in his mind of both the production and the actual working environment of Shelton Bar. He acknowledges that what he experienced every day at the steel works and considered at the time to be 'normal' was actually something quite 'unusual' to the audience of *Fight for Shelton Bar!* It is his desire to make sense of and help me (as the

interviewer) to understand this phenomenon which encourages him to use such descriptive language. It is interesting that Cheeseman describes the men of Shelton Bar as being able to draw pictures with their words saying: 'I never experienced in any body of men such richness of imagery and emotion as amongst the Shelton steelworkers' (Cheeseman 1977: 55). As an interviewer following Cheeseman thirty five years later, I found that Ken had retained this richness of imagery and used this to link the ordinary and the exceptional together.

Ken and Albert only made minor alterations to the plays. These were specific requests for cuts and changes to their original interviews to avoid possible offence to individuals and to clarify their meanings when the original was confused. Albert felt that he had been a little critical of Peter and wanted to emphasise his respect for the man thus adding the line 'he was mostly charming and inspiring' which hadn't been in the original. It is possibly because of my insider researcher status with Albert that he felt able to be critical of Peter, knowing that I was aware of the great friendship which existed between the two and also that I was familiar with and would have experienced some of Peter's more irritating traits. Albert went on to correct some of Ken's 'facts' which related to him (for example Ken stated that Albert was secretary to the Action Committee when in fact he was treasurer). Albert also asked for Ken's statement about his involvement in the fight to save the steel works to be altered as he felt it lessened Ted Smith's role in history and made him (Albert) look more important than he felt he was. I made these alterations as requested in order to ensure that the participants felt in control of their own narrative presentation within the play. Although narrative truth was more important than historical truth, this had to be a narrative truth which fitted for both participants and researcher.

Glenys and Ted both appear as characters within the play although clearly were not participants in the research (Peter also appears in the play although his interview did not directly relate to these narratives). All three 'characters' were part of the narratives of Albert and Ken and brought into the play in order to offer a theatrical and aesthetically interesting presentation of these narratives. Their presence on stage, as well as the brief appearance by Polly, also highlight the centrality of their roles within the lives of the participants, in relation to *Fight for Shelton Bar!*

Both Ken and Albert create links between the exceptional and the ordinary, something which Bruner (1990) suggests narratives encourage. Both men's links to the Vic theatre have been at different levels. Albert's life-course, his family, his working life and his retirement have all been impacted upon to a large extent by his involvement with the theatre and initially *Fight for Shelton Bar!* Ken has worked hard to find links to the Vic and ultimately tells stories relating to community, continuity and connectedness which tie his life-course to Shelton Bar steel works and the location of the theatre, far more than to the theatre itself. His narratives are relevant to this thesis as they are told because of his links to the documentary. It is *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and the Vic theatre which become the lens through which he explores his life-course. The themes of family and intergenerational cohesion are drawn together through the steel works for Ken and through the Vic theatre for Albert, with the catalyst for both sets of narratives being the documentary.

5.8 Source analysis : The Process

<i>Archival material used for source analysis:</i>
Performers Research Folders – Shelton Bar(SHEL) folder One, Box 12
Detailed tape abstract 57– green leader, folder 14, Box 12
Detailed tape abstracts 31-59 (Impact material) - folder 29, Box 12
Detailed tape abstract 12(Shangri la) green leader- folder 10, Box 12
Detailed abstract 12 (Cheeseman talks to the men) – red leader folder 10, Box 12
‘Family Impact’ material - folder 17, Box 12
‘First Script, Cut Scenes’ folder 27, Box 12
Shel 16, Red leader - Interview with Myra and Shirley (transcribed by myself)
Shel 44, Green leader tape – Interview with Mr and Mrs Cooper (transcribed by myself)
<i>Prompt copy</i>
<i>Published script</i>

Figure 5.10 Archived material for The Process

Moving on from this view of Albert and Ken’s life-courses I now present source analyses of two further scenes from *Fight for Shelton Bar!*: the Kaldo sequence (Cheeseman 1977: 24-25) and the Concast sequence (Cheeseman 1977: 29-32). These two scenes, relating to the process of steel making, required a slightly different way of working from the Mill Meeting scene. The source material was not as clear thus it demanded a deeper and broader exploration of the archive. My own title of this section ‘The Process’ relates not only to the steel-making process but also to the documentary-making process which the material for these scenes went through, from first collection of the data to final staged production, published text and programme

which contains material not included in the documentary but relating to older members of the Shelton Bar community and the intergenerational impact of the closure of the Bar. Cheeseman states in his notes to the scenes (Cheeseman 1977: 55) that the Kaldo and Concast sequences were 'revised entirely' during the re-rehearsal period which the documentary underwent after opening (there was a three-week period after its initial opening run during which time no other productions were in rehearsal and the permanent company had time to 'revise and re-rehearse' the documentary). This revision involved the removal of much of the material relating to the personal impact of the closing of Shelton Bar on the families of the workers. Cheeseman is very aware of this removal of what he calls the 'impact material' and has done so in order to drive the narrative of the fight to the forefront. He asks in a session with the steel men 'have we now reduced the impact material too much?' (SHEL 57 abstract: 4). This analysis looks at this missing 'impact material' exploring the interviews conducted with the retired employees of Shelton Bar and the families of the workers, which did not appear in the final documentary.

The Kaldo sequence (see Appendix 5.2) comes straight after the interval as the opening scene to Part Two. The scene depicts the Kaldo process of steel-making which involves molten iron ore and scrap being revolved in conical vessels called Kaldos, during which time oxygen is blown through them to produce molten steel. The material for this section was recorded by Cheeseman and his company on their many trips to the works. Some sixteen tapes were recorded marked 'works intensive' (Shell abstracts: 31-59), all containing descriptions of the steel-making process by those involved at the time. As Cheeseman points out, he was keen to capture parts of the process which could be reproduced on stage and which highlighted what stood out for him, which was the 'relationship between a man and the intense heat'

(Cheeseman 1977: 56). The actual dialogue included in the final script to describe the process is taken directly from these visits. The second section of the Kaldo sequence is sub-headed *Shangri-la*. The section involves six participants, including two wives, talking about their responses to Shelton Bar reducing its work force and partially closing. Phil and Stan describe Stoke-on-Trent as their Shangri-la, a place from which they never wish to move and in which they hope their families will stay. Both women in the scene are shocked and upset by the news of closure and the men are equally upset by the seemingly ridiculous loss of jobs as well as the prospective loss of self-respect which they see as tied to the loss of their current jobs at the Bar. This small section of personal response to the loss of Shelton Bar is sandwiched in-between the representation of the Kaldo process. The final section of the scene, entitled *Sampling*, continues the description of the process, mostly through audio recordings, with a visual representation on stage of the sampling process in which a very long handled spoon is placed into the molten mixture to take a sample and is then sent to the laboratories for analysis. This sequence was created by the company with the help of two Shelton steelworkers who came into rehearsal to demonstrate how the actors should hold the spoon and manoeuvre the equipment. This sandwiching of process and emotion/personal reaction echoes the structure of the entire documentary. The scene is unusual in that it allows individuals a personal reaction to the closure of the Works without it having to be set within the context of the fight.

Shangri-la opens with a speech from Phil Rogers (one of the steel-plant fitters), taken from (SHEL Tape 12). By including Phil's speeches in this scene Cheeseman and the company allow him to make a personal point about the impact the closure of Shelton will have, not so much on him (as his role is not particularly affected by the imminent closures) but on his

children. He can see his children having to leave Stoke-on-Trent to find work, and the local community, of which he feels very much a part, being split and lost to future generations.

Within this tiny section of the play we are presented with a view of the people of Stoke-on-Trent as home-loving people who do not wish to move out of their area. It is perhaps this desire to stay not only in the community of Stoke but also within the narrower community of Shelton Bar which makes the fight to keep the steel works such an interesting subject to Cheeseman. These are people who exist within their own local community and have done so for generations, and they hope that generations to come will also be able to do so. Whilst Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005: 205) point out that belonging is ‘not a fixed community’ but rather a ‘fluid process, seeing places as sites for performing identities’, this would not seem to apply to the families of Shelton Bar who attach their performance of identity very much to Shelton Bar in quite a closed and boundaried way. It is a love of place tied to community which Cheeseman must have identified with to a great extent.

The scene contains comment from two of the wives of Shelton workers. It is clear from the archival material that the input of the women was desired by the men of Shelton Bar. In an initial interview with Cheeseman and the steel workers, one worker states:

If you can work into your play the various women of the men who might lose their jobs then you have another strand. The Potteries women have a darn sight better standard than they ever used to have, so I think you should include the women married to the men of Shelton Bar coz they’re the backbone to us as well you know

[claps from all] (Shel 12, Red leader)

The closure of the Bar was to have a huge impact on these women. The steel worker believes that the women of the Potteries now have an improved life-course. They have husbands, sons, fathers and brothers in reasonably paid employment and the closure of the steel works will put this at risk. The 'voice' of the women is not heard much within the finished documentary, possibly because these women did not work at Shelton Bar; the narrative of the drama would have had to step outside of the Bar in order to integrate their thoughts and it would thus have taken the focus away from the fight. The songs are perhaps one way which the feelings and thoughts of the women enter the documentary, and it is interesting that it was a woman, Polly Warren, who wrote many of these songs.

The beginning of Part Two of the play, opening with the Kaldo sequence, was the place where Cheeseman and his company first chose to place what Cheeseman calls the 'family impact material'. He states in one of the many scribbled sheets of notes referring to the structure of the documentary, which were then carefully archived, 'Kaldo is impact section – families. (In one lump, a solid digression) – Gloomy' (SHEL Box 12: folder 17). Cheeseman clearly intended to place a good deal of impact material at this point in the play but felt that this did not work, perhaps because it was too 'gloomy' or too much of a 'solid digression' from the fight narrative, and so removed much of this material. Two songs were cut from this section of the documentary, 'Swanky Clogs' and 'Vulcan Activities', both written by retired steelworker Cecil Shipley and included in the programme (Victoria Theatre 1974). 'Swanky Clogs' is a reminiscence of the way the old steel men used to dress and behave; the song finishes with the verses:

Salt of the earth, hardworking men,
 Rough, but nature's gentlemen
 Whippets and pigeons were their pets
 Which won and lost them many bets
 They sweated they swore

As the heat they tended
 Finally reaching their allotted score
 Their jobs
 Their lives
 Their jobs
 Their lives
 Ended

(8)

Shipley sees the steelworkers' lives and jobs as interconnected; he seems to imply that once they reached an older age and their jobs ended so did their lives. Although Cheeseman found he could not include the songs in his final production he did leave them in the programme as mentioned earlier.

Cecil Shipley's second song, 'Vulcan Activities', also relates to the intergenerational role Shelton played and the impact which the closure would now have on generations to come. He writes:

Thy Vulcan activities must cease
 By decree of BSC,
 Puddling smelting and cokemaking, dead
 Silence reigns in the 32" shed
 Five generations helped you disgorge
 Iron and steel from your forge
 To faraway lands your girders went
 The Americas, India and the Orient
 Railway lines and channels too
 Made for home and Timbuktu
 No matter how profitable you be
 It has been decreed by BSC
 Farewell Shelton Bar

Founded by Lord Granville 1846
 Confounded by Lord Melchett
 Nineteen seventy three
 (Victoria Theatre 1974: 8)

Though retired, Mr Shipley feels very strongly about the loss of Shelton and the ‘five generations’ of workers who have played a role in the steel plant. He suggests that the opportunities for generations to come to follow in their father’s footsteps have been ‘confounded’ by Melchett and the British Steel Corporation. The song uses archaic language to open, which draws the audience into a past time, contrasting sharply with the industrial language of cokemaking and puddling. Shipley draws the five generations together within the song, suggesting the uses that the steel has been put to over the generations and the international links which the steel plant has created between Stoke-on-Trent and the rest of the world.

As stated above the final staged version of the production begins with a description of the Kaldo process, however, in the ‘First Script, Cut Scenes’ (Box 12: folder 27) the Kaldo sequence begins with Bob Cant (MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central 1966-1983) talking about his father’s role in Shelton from the age of 11 to 74, in which he links Shelton to the pottery industry and its importance to Stoke-on-Trent, saying that both industries had a ‘family atmosphere’. His speech ends with the statement which is included below, and which Cheeseman put into the programme. From handwritten notes on the cut script, it would appear that Graham Watkins (the actor playing Bob Cant) was to improvise a speech about Bob Cant’s Father’s role at Shelton Bar. Cheeseman’s handwritten words on the script read: ‘Graham W informal speech based on this’. The notes offered to the actor Graham Watkin for his

improvised speech end with the words 'Also... retired steelworkers looking on at the Shelton situation sadly... one of them, Cecil Shipley, has contributed our first two songs in Part Two. A tribute to the Steelworkers of Shelton's long past' (First Script: Cut Scenes). Graham was meant to end his speech making reference to the retired men of the Bar and to the authorship of the two subsequently cut songs. The scene then moved into the Kaldo process, which was initially intended to begin by describing how the process has changed over time from the far more exhausting and 'severe' process it was in the past. A statement from Bob Cant also appears in the programme; the statement again highlights the loss of intergenerational employment: 'I think this feeling that they were part of the firm was much more pronounced than in most other industries. [...] Shelton Bar was a symbol of a firm that would employ generations of people'(Cheeseman 1977: 8). Cheeseman's inclusion of Bob Cant's statement in the programme appears to be purposefully political, forging Party political links between the Labour Party, the documentary and the local community. This appears to be acceptable to Cheeseman as Bob Cant's family and heritage is bound up with the steel works, thus making the Political statement a local one.

Cheeseman openly states in the notes to the published play that the company had to cut 'a lot of material about the social and domestic impact of the situation, all of which had ended up at this point in the order of events' (Cheeseman 1977: 55). I did not find a script which showed this material included but I did find the 'Impact' file (Box 12: folder 29) which was full of this material. There are six pages of handwritten transcription of what Cheeseman calls 'Part Two District Impact', including input from Mrs Timmis, Mrs Whalley, Shirley Rogers, Mrs Foster and Mrs Smith. As an example Mrs Smith states, 'But what's going to happen to

Stoke-on-Trent if they did close it? It'll become a ghost town more or less, wouldn't it?'. She goes on to say, 'I mean what's going to happen to the younger generation – where are they going to go to work? People would have to move out of the district wouldn't they? They wouldn't be able to stop in Stoke-on-Trent because there wouldn't be any work for them.' Mrs Smith exposes the impact that the closure of the steel works will have on future generations and on the community of Stoke-on-Trent. Mrs Foster's narrative of district impact is quite different:

Its very hard, isn't it, when um they fought for the country and now they've got to fight for a job. Its very very hard. I mean, some people have never been in the war, they don't know what it is – they've never bin on the dole, they don't know what it is. Its only those people who've known which will fight to the bitter end.

Her narrative looks at the suffering which many of these older men have already had to go through and which seems to make the whole process of having to fight for their jobs so unfair; however, she also acknowledges that it is this older generation who are used to having to fight for their lives who will be willing to fight to keep the steel works open.

There are a further ten pages in the impact file relating to 'family impact', with a great deal of the commentry coming from the wives. Mrs Timmis talks of being at a time in her life when she did not expect to have to fight for her existence, she states:

We've struggled while the children have been younger, y'know what I mean, we've always sort o' just kept our head above board. Now we were just beginning to sit back a bit and thinking, well, there we are – the future's planned for a bit and then right out of the blue – this.

Mrs Timmis is reaching a phase in her life-course when she expected to be able to look forward to a planned retirement and enjoy a little relaxation in her older age but the threat of redundancy has disrupted this expectation. For Shirley Rogers the narrative focus is on the suffering which the closures will bring to the wives as they try to keep their families in food and homes, she states 'If they lose their jobs [...] it'll still hit the wives, whatever happens, it's going to hit the wives most, whatever happens'. She recognises the pivotal role that she and the other wives play in supporting the family and the impact which the loss of jobs will have on them and thus on the family as a whole. The narratives of the women were listened to and transcribed by Cheeseman and his research team, showing that family and the older members of the community were important to the research process and yet they do not carry the narrative of the fight forward and so are omitted from the final documentary.

The Concast sequence (see Appendix 5.3) follows a few scenes after the Kaldo sequence and in a similar way it describes the Concast process (Cheeseman 1977: 29-32). The process was a very visible one and was acted out on stage whilst the scene was being presented. Cheeseman took much of the dialogue for this scene from one interview session with Walter Watkins (a mould operator) and interspersed this with other bits of material he gained from his many other 'works intensive' visits. The scene concludes with a speech from Ted in which he describes Shelton Bar as 'a place of worship, not a place of work' (Cheeseman 1977: 30). The scene then moves into the *Rover's Song*, created by Romy Saunders from the stories the research team had been told about Shelton men who had left or retired from the Bar. Interspersed with the song Walt continues to discuss the way this part of Shelton Bar runs and complains of the difficult conditions that are faced there and the injuries which men working on

the Caldo have suffered. Also interspersed with the song two women, just given the names Myra and Shirley, along with and Glenys Cooper (Albert Cooper's wife) talk of the conditions their husband's work in and their attachment (or not) to Shelton.

The wives' comments within this scene are taken from two interviews: one with Shirley and Myra (SHEL 16: red leader) and one with Mr and Mrs Cooper (SHEL 44: Green leader). The women talk about the possibility of their husbands losing their jobs and what this would mean to their families. They discuss the dirt and filth that the men bring home but also relate stories of men who have left and later returned to the Bar, thus concluding that 'it can't be as bad as it p'raps sounds, y'know' (Cheeseman 1977: 31). The full, unabridged narrative from the original interview makes a far stronger point that for Myra it probably is as bad as it sounds. Myra and Shirley do not seem to share the sense of Shelton Bar as a community and of a family, yet they support their husbands in the fight and have discussed forming a wives' group. It becomes apparent that Myra is spending a lot of time at home alone, with her husband involved in the fight for Shelton, and that her children are not happy in their school. Her desire for her husband to stay at Shelton is therefore not great; she would be happy to move for the sake of a new job. Shirley is not so happy to move, having ageing and ill parents and children who do not like change; she is far more desperate for Shelton to remain open. The narratives in this interview are personal to these specific women and do not push the main narrative of the fight forward in a continuously positive line, which is possibly why much was left out of the finished scene.

Glenys Cooper's narrative is one that highlights the intergenerational nature of the Bar as an employer. Her family has worked there for generations and though she herself has never

been employed by Shelton Bar, she acknowledges a debt to the works for her home and for 'everything that I've got' (Cheeseman 1977: 31). Her short speech comes in the middle of the Rover's song and, as included in my second play, *Working Round Here*. Albert described Glenys as finding it quite difficult to watch herself being represented on stage during this scene, due to its emotional and personal nature. It clearly is an emotional statement but its location within a song allows Cheeseman to place it outside of the main narrative; it has become personal commentary on the narrative rather than an integral part of that narrative.

The song section ends with another speech from Ted in which he talks of his Father giving his life for industry, asking 'what did he get out of it? He handed his history and his heritage down to me, that he'd fought and worked for. He'd bin crushed and maimed and buried y'know, in a pit' (Cheeseman 1977: 32). Ted believes that his father's 'history and heritage' are what has made him the man he is. He goes on to relate his father's fight to his own fight to save Shelton Bar, and as the scene ends we are pulled back from the world outside of the Bar, the world of wives and retired men, into that of the ongoing fight. Cheeseman has brought the key narrative back into focus.

Whilst Cheeseman's driving narrative was that of the fight to keep Shelton steel works open, mine is of the lives of those involved and their subsequent life-course and ageing in the context of their local community. In my archival investigation of *Fight for Shelton Bar!* I uncovered themes within interviews with retired employees of Shelton, some of which have been mentioned above. I began to explore the links between the experiences of coming to the end of a working life, for those retired steel men and their families interviewed by the Vic

research team in the 1970s, and those participants and performers now reaching or in retirement and interviewed for this research. Having discussed in the previous source analysis the missing stories of the retired men from the Bar, I now offer my findings within another brief play: a narrative analysis, allowing my audience an opportunity to make their own connections between the retirement narratives of the present and the past.

5.9 *The Retirement— Closing the Circle*

The following play has been created in a slightly different way from the previous two within this chapter. It includes the material which I found in the archive relating to older retired workers from Shelton Bar as well as to the families of those who were nearing retirement at this time of change and uncertainty at Shelton. Cheeseman and his research team had made a concerted effort to interview a number of retired workers and find out about their own experiences at the Bar as well as gathering stories about the experiences which they remembered or had been told about their fathers and grandfathers. In this way the narrative could go back for generations. The narrative interviews were therefore carried out by the Vic research team in 1973 and as such I have had no input into them. Most were not fully transcribed by the team, but the main gist of each section was written down as an 'abstract'. I have transcribed the relevant parts, in full, myself.

The transcribed sections taken from the original interviews are juxtaposed with Chris Martin's narratives taken from an interview conducted by the Ages and Stages team. Chris Martin started work at the Vic at the age of 21 as an actor and went on to become an associate

director to Peter Cheeseman. Chris was part of the cast for *Fight for Shelton Bar!* although he had not been involved in the research process. When Cheeseman retired Chris left the Vic and developed and ran part of the drama course at Staffordshire University, retiring in 2010. When I first approached him he was six months away from retirement but seemed unhappy about discussing it. He and I had worked together at the Vic several times.

The Ages and Stages team interviewed Chris six weeks before he retired. I could not attend. I received the transcription of the interview before the recording itself and it was interesting how much I could hear of his intonation and speech patterns in the transcription, even though these had been 'cleaned up'. I read the text with Chris's voice in my head. I got a flavour of the meeting and felt I had a better understanding of his meanings, giving me the confidence to script his lines in stanzaic form. When I listened to the original recording I was able to relate it both to the text and to my own 'reading'.

Just as Cheeseman relied upon his research team to gather material I have drawn on my colleagues within Ages and Stages to provide some of my material. For Cheeseman this contributed to a multi-vocality within the documentary; for me it helped to balance the 'insider researcher' I would have been as an interviewer with my role as a playwright. In this way my research adds another dimension, another layer, to the Ages and Stages account. I can offer an alternative view of the way involvements with *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, and other aspects of community life in the Vic theatre community, and its engagement with people in Stoke, affected the participants' life-courses.

The Shelton Bar participants whose narratives are included here (Ernie Landon, Mr and Mrs Timmis, Jack and Mrs Foster, Mr and Mrs Whalley), were interviewed by the Vic research team including Polly Warren – whose voice can be heard within the play continuing her linking presence throughout the chapter – during the research period for the documentary in 1973. I represent the voices of the Shelton Bar participants via audio recording in order to differentiate between the 1973 interviews and the current interview with Chris, whilst the inclusion of both sets of narratives in the play acknowledges the links between the two. I have written their lines as I transcribed them rather than in stanzas as a further differentiation between the two sources. To highlight the links between past and present and to give a visual representation of the voices the audience hears, I have presented three non-speaking characters who move from one side of the stage to the other during the action, signifying the passage of time and the movement through their life-courses. By offering the voices of the past in audio format I am offering a real flavour of the original accents and speech as well as allowing a larger number of characters to be represented on stage without the need to crowd the stage with a large cast. There are three 'Chris' characters. All are dressed the same. Chris 1 is in his early 20's, Chris 2 in his 40's and Chris 3 in his 60's.

Throughout the play there are sound effects of backstage calls and general theatre noise as well as the sounds of Shelton Bar – these fade in and out in relation to which character is speaking/about to speak. The sound effects emphasise the links between the theatre and Shelton Bar and also the contrasts between the two.

The stage is covered with a floor cloth which depicts the floor plan of the Victoria theatre. In the centre of the floor cloth is an image of Shelton Bar steel works. The two images intersect in places but can still be seen independently of one another.

The actors enter from each Vom and each stairwell. As the play progresses the non-speaking characters move down the steps they have entered from and across the stage and up the steps on the other side of the stage or down one of the Voms.

There are screens hung above the auditorium so that the audience can all see the images presented on them.

The three versions of Chris enter from the Voms DL, DR and UC

The play opens with Chris 3 entering from the UC vom

Chris 3: I wouldn't mind telling the story from my point-of-view one day,

Not cos it's important,

It's that no-one else knows about my point of view except me

And we all know that if nothing's written down it dies,

Doesn't it?

Chris 1 enters from DL

Chris 1: I remember walking up from Stoke station,

The first time I ever came,

And I was in a foreign land, and –

I'm sure it was a steam train; was it?

Perhaps I'm exaggerating, perhaps it wasn't –

1964, I don't know, who knows?

Might be a last one, never know.

And then I walked down Hartshill Road

And just these buildings and these terraces and this place,
And a place I was going to stay for 6 years,
And huge things happen to you from that age for any of us,
21, 21 odd-ish, up to 27 to 8.

But it was so different you know, I think there might be –

But it smelt terrible, and in the winter it's appalling:

You couldn't see across the road,

Got terrible colds all the time;

A stink, a horrible smell of sulphur,

That whole pall over everywhere,

And the steelwork at Shelton Bar that used to glow at night.

But in a funny way, I don't know,

That was the background;

In fact I was in the theatre.

Chris 3: The theatre was a strange place.

It was a place of the absolute present,

But it did things about the past.

And you're in the 1960s,

It was freedom, God, I got in the theatre to escape;

I felt it was a huge escape from the kind of ghastly,

Having to be dragged up in the 1950s.

Chris 1: I think I saw Peter in London, Peter Cheeseman in London.

He was 32 then;

He's always 11 years older than me

So there you are.

I was only a young bloke,

I was 21 when I joined with Stoke.

You know, I wrote away,

And I saw Peter and did my audition pieces

– no I didn't, I tell a lie –

He talked to me and he talked to me, like,

It was just bizarre:

'What are you doing?'

'Oh, doing this and that',

'Well, where've you been?'

'Well, I've been there and been there and done this',

'Hum'.

And he said

'what does your father do?'

and I said

'Chartered Accountant'.

'Oh, good, yeah, tell me about your education',

'Well, I did this 'n' that',

'Oh, good, good, right, ok.'

He asked me a few more questions then he said

'Right, you've got the job',

And I said

'But I haven't done anything',

And he said

'There are only two things that are important as far as I'm concerned

- one is heart and the heart in a person

And the second is they've got a decent parentage

And decent education'.

The screens around the stage light up with images of Shelton Bar in the nineteenth century through to 1991. The lights change to a sepia brown. The following words are heard over the speaker system.

Ernie Landon:²⁶ Me grandfather started at the age of 12 in 1854. Me grandfather died in 1908 after doing 54 years at Shelton. My Uncle Charlie, which is his son, he did 42 years. Uncle John was the eldest son; he did 60 years at Shelton. My Uncle Tom he did 30 years and my Father did 43 years, he's the only one I can prove because I've got a clock which says 'Ernie Landon 43 years', and myself I did 47 years. I don't think me grandfather ever had a holiday in his life. He couldn't read. Me grandmother could read, she went to a dame school for a penny a week. Uncle John was forced to retire after 60 years and he pleaded with George Goodwin, who was the

²⁶ This section is taken from Shell 9 Green leader.

manager, to be kept on and he left in tears. Me Father also left in tears at age 70 and he had to be accompanied home because he couldn't carry his clock and he was broken-hearted for weeks. Now I didn't quite finish in tears but I was very close to it.

The screens fade out and the lights return to normal

Chris 3: I've been musing on this quite extraordinary thing
About being a young man.

There was a particular documentary called The Knotty,
Which first went on in 1966 and I was 22 to 23,
And I remember I had to portray two people, actually,
One was a man –

Both of them were in their 80s,
So they are now long, long dead,
You know so it's really quite interesting that there is still a link, if you like,
As we sit here,

Between these two old chaps who used to work on the railways,
And there, yes, links back to the First World War,
Which it can do from 1966,

And this is what I've been musing on before I say anymore.

Chris 1: Cos it's so clear in my head now – about portraying,
As a young man,

Like I'm 23 doing First World War scenes of a man of 85,

And I'm the right age to play it, if you understand,
And I can even remember the words because he would,
You know tell his story –
This is Harry Sharratt.

Chris 3: But I remember the first night,
Remember so clearly as if I'm walking about the stage now,
And you could always see the audience in the old theatre,
You could see their faces,
And I could see Harry Sharratt sitting there,
And I'm being him –
I don't mean impersonating him, just essence –
And I looked out and caught him
And he had tears pouring down his face.

Chris 1: Celebrate –
I supposed it's a pretty rough subject
But it's about celebrating people's lives,
Which I thought was one of the key things
About the relationship between,
You know,
All the hundreds of people that one's done documentaries on,
You know, just ordinary folk,
That perhaps could just sit in their chairs

And nobody ever asks anything,

Or they're quiet about it –

Anyway, suddenly, you know, they're kind of elevated,

The lights change again and the images of Shelton through the ages
continue to show. The following is heard over the sound system

Mr Timmis:²⁷ During the war all the women of the Potteries pulled all the stops out. They went to work as had never been used to going to work. They did this without any arguments; they did it. And now they're asking those particular women who did that particular time to do it again, because they are in that age group now to do exactly the same thing again. Now take myself for instance. I'm on the staff at Shelton; well, I worked there 20 years for when I retire. Now obviously once you start paying into a pension fund you look to this as your security for when you retire. This is going to be thrown by the boards and it's been 20 years at it. Get nothing for it at all. You'll get a bit back that you've paid in less tax and administration costs, but your future that you'd planned has gone and you've got to start all over again. How can a man of 50 years of age, when he's only got 15 years left of his working life, plan again for the future? This is one of the biggest ironies of all this.

Polly: Most of the men employed at Shelton fall into that age gap.

²⁷ This section is taken from Shell 25 green leader

All: Yes they do, yes.

Mrs T: We've struggled when the children have been younger, you know what I mean, we've always just kept our heads above board now we were just beginning to sit back a bit and think well there we are the future's planned for a little bit.

Mr T: Correct.

Mrs T: And then right out of the blue, this.

Mr T: We've always discussed, haven't we? You know, I'm paying quite a lot for this pension, you know, lump sums and so on, so as when I retire it'll be ok, we can do things then that we haven't been able to do in the past. These last two years have crucified me. These things you plan and you sit down and you think about and all of a sudden somebody in a bloody little office gets a red pen and says, you're finished.

The lights return to normal

Chris 3: Anyway, back to the subject,

That's when I first arrived there and of course Peter –

And I said it at Peter's burial thing –

I remember now when Peter was interred in the ground in this wonderful nature place,

Carmountside, that was an extraordinary occasion –

But I was saying, that's right, I was giving my valedictory thing,

And I talked about these days,

They were just wonderful,
 Not nostalgic,
 Just extraordinary education, you know?
 Experiential education every day,
 Every hour –
 ‘Who are these people? What’s this about? What’s this subject matter?
 What’s it all about?
 We’ve got to really dig into it to find out.’
 I used to fight with Peter all the time as well,
 But maybe a lot of institutions, you know,
 You really –
 You can fight with the person who’s running it all the time,
 You can challenge all the time,
 But of course they are there creating a situation
 That you can be in to challenge them, isn’t it?

The lights change again and the images of Shelton Bar can be seen on the screens. The following is heard over the sound system.

Jack Foster:²⁸ What I think too– it’s part of your job when you finish. I mean, when you retire, and you go round to the blokes and y’like y’finish at 65, you’ve done y’work, and yer – the fellas shake y’hand an’ that an’ –

²⁸ This section is taken from Shell 20, Yellow leader

Mrs Foster: Oh yes.

Mr Foster: You know, you're going to miss that. I shall.

Mrs F: You're not going to have that.

Jack: I mean, a lot think as I'm a bit of a sentimental fool p'raps, because I was one of the few that chose a clock when we had the service, y'know, it's in there – but I'm proud of that clock.

Mrs F: That was the first 30 years – yes.

Jack: And I hope as my son will have it when anything happens to me, and he'll think the same – well, that was me dad's, he'd done his service at Shelton, y'know – and I would, and this is what I think I shall miss retiring.

Mrs F: Yes, you will.

Jack: Retiring properly

Mrs F: Because you just finish, you just...

Jack: You're cut off before y'time.

Mrs F: Yes it is, isn't it?

Jack: Now even if, if I go to another job, if I went to another job where I should be alright – it wouldn't be the same as finishin' me days at Shelton. Because I've been cut off, y'know.

Mrs F: Well, you're all leaving aren't you – y'know, you kind of hand your work down, y'get so many each week like that and you're all leavin' so you've got no individual leaving.

Jack: I mean, we've 'ad fellas this last few week retirin' an' it's bin nice, y'know. You've seen them, you've 'ad a collection and so on – all the best an' that. Well, we shall just go away.

Mrs F: With your cards and your cheque.

Jack: I mean, even though, if when you retire – you feel a pull. I had to take a bloke home an' he never spoke to me, who'd retired that day. I always gave 'im a lift, y'know, an' he'd retired an' he never spoke, he went off, but I would rather that than just bein' cut off. He had a collection, he had the blokes wishin' 'im well, an' all that.

Mrs F: When you leave they'll just say, well, 'I hope you get a job'.

Jack: An' this is what I've thought... I shan't be retirin' how I want to retire, and this is it.

Mrs F: You are cheated of something – especially as you're getting older, you've got less years to work at anywhere.

Jack: It's actually the– it's a cruel world, really, when you look at it like that.

The lights change back to 'normal'
Chris 2 enters from DR Vom

Chris 3: I tried to explain to Peter once about being a schizoid personality,
'What's that? What do you mean?'

'Well, Peter, it's that basically I'm mad',

Meaning there's two of me,

So there is one of me that watches myself,

And there's one of me that does things,
 And the one's watching me, it's always the split between two,
 That's the one I use completely objective,
 See both sides to every question
 Then the other person goes around in different ways.

The lights change once again to Shelton Bar and the images begin to show on the screens. The following is heard over the sound system

Polly Warren:²⁹ What's your connection with Shelton?

Mrs Whalley: Only Stan.

He's been there most of his life, about 27 years.

Eldest son works there as well, he's 25.

Polly Warren: How about you Mrs Timmis?

Mrs Timmis: Tom's worked there, how long is it? 20 years.

Tom: About 20 years, yes. And I've got two uncles work there and going back in history on my grandfather's side.

Mrs Timmis: My children are doing apprenticeships and it might be as they want to go on there. I mean where are these men going to work? At 50 where's he going to get a job?

Tom: I'll come and work with you in the shop. I can always come and hold your hand. (laughs)

²⁹ This section is taken from Shell 25 Green leader

Mrs T: It isn't that, it's pride isn't it? When they've never been out of work. Well, I mean, there isn't work for these young 'uns now, what chance is there for them when they're 50! You feel as if you're on the scrap heap, don't you? I know he wouldn't be out of work. He'd do anything before he'd be out of work. But that isn't the point. It's his pride isn't it.

Mr Whalley: Ann's the accountant. She runs the house. If this hurdle came and we lost our jobs and had to take a pay-cut, she'd find a way to get over it, but I would suggest that its small reward for any housewife when she's got to start pruning at her time of life, when someone's given their whole life to industry. My life's been in two places: the forces and Shelton.

The lights change back to the normal stage

Chris 2: Then I came back as a director.

Y'know it's kind of –

It's a big change – early 50s,

Quite difficult over 50 years.

Chris 3: Don't forget I stopped being an actor in about 1983,

It's a long, long time ago.

The second Fight for Shelton Bar! I was in,

Used to like playing this character called Albert Cooper.

Cos you've heard about Albert Cooper; that name comes up?

Well, he's exactly the same age as me,

So you know his age:

His'll be exactly the same as mine.

Chris 2: I came back as a writer and a director, changed jobs.

By then I'd been running this in Leicester –

You know,

30 years ago I became a director of the Leicester Phoenix,

It was the kind of left-wing alternative to the Haymarket.

I loved that job, y'know,

I'd do anything, but then I went back,

Peter tempted me back by offering me a commission.

I wrote –

I finished up doing about 25 adaptations in the end –

That's the thing I loved doing: Victorian novels, that stuff.

Then I played Macbeth in 1982; that's the last big part I played,

But that's '82, it's a long time ago, isn't it?

But I was there right through to the end of the old theatre,

Directing plays and stuff, doing various things.

Then the new theatre,

Didn't start it off there cos me and Peter had,

Not fallen out,

But drifted away,

And I remember,

Think I said something,

Didn't like his programme for the first year,
And that upset him, but within 4 plays I was back
Because he phoned me up once, 11 o'clock at night,
I remember lying in bed in London,
'Chris, Peter.'
'Peter, good God! How are you?'
'Well, I need you up here.'
So I then had this relationship,
Associate Director,
So I would just be on and off, just come back home again,
Adapted things there,
Then directed a play, freelancing,
Coming in and out all the time.
I had a something,
Sort of crisis-y thing really,
Where I was tired of acting, I think,
And I had some psychotherapy, psychoanalysis.
I was in my mid-30s.
Marriage had all fallen apart, and god knows what,
And just felt being a bit, you know,
Didn't know where to go,
And I think I discovered that I was sick of pretending,

And that's what acting is,
And the sort of acting the way we were taught –
It's really important I say this –
The great acting is the sort you can't see through, you know, isn't it?
It's just completely transformative.
You're in touch with absolutely everything of yourself and it can happen.
And I think you can do that so many nights
And so many days
Especially when you're young and very,
You know you're only a kid really, 17-18,
And I think I just hit a crisis
And didn't know who I was anymore,
And what my psychoanalysis was,
Was finding out who I was,
Cos I've got two names, you see,
I'm Chris Martin but that's not my real name; I wasn't born that.
I'm much more used to now,
I do it slowly through the bank and stuff.
I start to use my real name,
I don't know who the hell Martin's cheque is or who the hell Martin is,
But Chris, I'm used to that,
It's who I feel I am,

And I wanted to stop acting as I,
kind of on principle,
What I thought was acting, pretending, I'm sick of it,
I'm tired of standing there and going through all this emotion,
Going through this tragedy
And all these people are kind of laughing and crying at you –
Don't want to do it anymore.
That was what I thought;
That's why I stopped doing it.
Chris 3: I just changed
And I've been very, very lucky
Right through to getting my job,
Cos I went to the university on a brand new course,
I had a wonderful time there,
I really did, cos I left at the perfect time,
They haven't replaced me and my colleagues,
They've been replaced with part-time people,
Professionals really.
I love acting, I mean, I do now, but I'm ok now,
I'm an older man now,
I know what's going on,
I know what's going on and I love doing it

And I love adulation and I love all that.
I just love it, that's why I loved university,
Teaching drama at university,
I think,
I mean I know it might sound odd but I'm so grateful for that period,
Which is the last 10 years, to be,
I mean I don't know what it is
I just love to be with these young people,
And get their respect,
And with their respect it's like you can really feel ok.
I really think now –
God, I seem to spend my life going every fortnight,
Going down to Sussex
Where my mother is still alive,
She's 96, nearly,
And Mary's got parents in a care home in Milton Keynes,
Grim, and I think
God, is this it?
Just with people older than me all the time,
But I don't know,
I'm still at the stage,
That's why I got from the doctor about anxiety I suppose.

I've gotta find my feet now.
 What's going to happen, I'm not,
 You know I'm sure that fate would lend a hand in a way,
 But I do like acting or playing the game, it's fantastic.
 I don't have to worry about money,
 Course I need money,
 But I don't worry about it –
 But health-wise I've been very lucky,
 I've got tons of energy and
 I don't know what's going to happen but I could,
 You know, just see.
 It's all a good story. I mean I might even go back to acting,
 Who knows,
 You know, contact someone and see if I could get myself,
 You know,
 Finish up you know like Robert Powell is on Holby City.

The lights change once again to Shelton Bar and the images begin to
 show on the screens. The following snippet of song is heard over the
 sound system

A male voice sings:³⁰

³⁰ Taken from 'The Celebrated Sinter' Man by Polly Warren – the song was inspired by and dedicated to Stan Whalley – it is sung to the tune of The Celebrated Working Man (Victoria Theatre 1974: 3).

It's getting on for snappin' time
 We've nearly reached the end
 It gets cooked in the igniter
 Then we reach the Sinter strand
 We break it into pieces and we take it to the Blast
 That's how I pass the hours on the Sinter Plant

There are many men who cannot stand the darkness and the dust
 They won't spend their lives a-burrowing in the earth's dark crust
 But for me, I'm asking just one thing, I hope the Lord will grant
 Let me end me working days upon the Sinter Plant.

The three silent characters are standing at the top of the stairwells, the lights come up on them and they bow to Chris and then to the audience. They then continue up the stairwells and exit
 The three Chrises move to CS they bow to each other, shake hands and then turn and bow to the audience.
 The Three Chrises turn back to each other and walk past one another to exit up the opposite Vom.

5.10 Analysis of Narrative

The play is entitled *The Retirement* which forms the major theme running through the narratives of Chris and those of the original sources of *Fight for Shelton Bar!* This analysis expands the thesis by exploring this theme within the narratives as well as discussing further themes of representation, intergenerational relationships, education, age-cohort, family and

further meanings of community in relation to the theatre and to the locality, all of which became apparent when creating this play. The play also privileges the voices of the women and their families, connecting the narratives of the original sources to those explored in the literary analyses and to those of Ken within *Working round here: Stories from two of the original participants of *Fight for Shelton Bar!**

5.10.1 Retirement and life-course

Chris's original narrative followed his life-course from beginnings at the Vic through to leaving acting and the theatre and finding a new direction within Staffordshire University. One thought leads him to the next as he makes links from his past to his present and onto his future. As Hockey and James point out, 'memory thus serves to bolster self-identity in different ways through the telling and retelling of particular kinds of narratives' (2003: 208). It is interesting in light of this that Chris (who is a great story teller) believes that he has lost his self-identity through years of playing other characters on stage. This telling and re-telling of narratives would appear to have been disrupted by the need to 'become' different characters on such a regular basis; his sense of self and ageing have possibly been shifted by a need to play roles which have not necessarily related to his chronological age. Chris would appear to have overcome this issue by leaving his acting career; stopping representing others on stage, and taking on a role which involves an equal amount of performance but in a totally different arena (as a lecturer). However, this does not appear to have enabled him to come to terms with his own identity; something which only begins to happen once he has retired.

Chris's arrival at the Vic and in Stoke coincided with a time in his life when he believes that 'huge things happen to you' (the age of 21-28). It was a time of learning for Chris during which he 'grew up' and also during which time he formed a lasting relationship with Cheeseman. This links with Romy and Polly's narratives in *Rounding up the Ladies for the Company*, in which Romy very much saw the Vic as an expansion of her education and Polly saw it as an awakening. Chris's introduction to Cheeseman also links forward to Alice's 'audition' in Chapter Six and to some extent to Steve's introduction to the theatre, also included in Chapter Six of this thesis. Cheeseman again points to looking for company members who 'fit' the theatre. He is looking for 'heart' in Chris as well as education and a good family background. I am unsure what Cheeseman meant by this, but he was possibly looking for people from 'stable' backgrounds and possibly linked to a left-wing political stance.

Chris's loss of self begins with a psychological breakdown in his mid-30s and having to look for support in finding himself amidst the Chrises and the Martins which have been his given and self-appointed identities throughout his life-course. His thoughts and feelings can be linked to a similar breakdown which Steve Granville narrates within Chapter Six and is discussed in further depth there. It would appear that retirement is now forcing Chris to confront his ageing self and he is feeling distressed by this and having to seek medical intervention. He is aware that 'I'm an older man now'. He has not been looking forward to retiring and suggests that he may return to acting rather than accept an 'end' to his working life. It is interesting that acting is a profession where 'retirement' is often not age generated or defined. Many actresses retire in middle age due to family commitments and a lack of decent parts (this is also discussed within Chapter Six) and yet there are parts for older men and women in both theatre and

television. Chris refers to an actor, Robert Powell, the same age as himself, who has encountered a resurgence in his career just as Chris is retiring, and it is with this later-life professional 'success' in mind that he suggests returning to acting himself.

Retirement has forced Chris to re-evaluate himself which contrasts with the narratives of the Shelton Bar steel workers and their wives who were looking forward to retirement and are now having to re-evaluate their expectations of retirement. The life-narratives that these workers and their wives had expected to live within have been destroyed and they are fighting to retain not only their jobs but their desired and expected life narrative. Spence (1982) talks of the self as being able to 'weave' a story from 'who I am' to 'where I am going'. He believes that 'the core of our identity is really a narrative thread that gives meaning to our life' (485) but goes on to say that this is only the case if the thread is never broken. He describes the destruction of this thread when faced with serious illness, but the same destruction of a grand life-narrative, which we expect to fulfil, fits for these participants. The meaning which these employees and their wives had created within their life-narratives has been shattered by something out of their control and they must attempt to re-build their narratives in an unexpected and undesired direction.

Chris Martin's narrative thread would also seem to be broken on a number of occasions during his life-course. He considers himself to have been lucky as something has always enabled him to re-tie his thread with a different yet equally fulfilling narrative. It would appear that it is only now, in retirement, that he is uncertain how to achieve this redirection of narrative, yet he is aware that he desires and requires this narrative thread to be re-created in order to move

forward. He must start by reclaiming his 'real' name which he seems to be struggling to come to terms with but acknowledging the importance of doing so. He suggests a number of possible future narrative threads including returning to acting and possibly to the 'fame and fortune' which he has not previously gained or apparently sought. This idea can be linked back to Polly's narratives in *Rounding up the Ladies for the Company*, in which she discusses the lack of 'fame and fortune' as a positive aspect of her acting career and life-course. The idea of the Vic as a place which does not encourage those performers who seek 'fame' also becomes a theme running through Charlie Barker and Alice Arnold's narratives in Chapter Six of this thesis.

For Jack and Mrs Foster retirement was an aim and an expectation. Like Ernie Landon and his father and grandfather, they had prepared for retirement with savings and a desire to celebrate their working life at Shelton Bar and be celebrated for their commitment and loyalty. Jack Foster talks of his pride at receiving a clock after thirty years of service and his desire to pass this legacy onto his son. A loss of retirement due to the closure of the Bar and subsequent redundancy will rob Jack of his 'pride'. He will no longer be able to walk out of the works at retirement age feeling proud of his long service achievement and with a further symbol of retirement (in the form of a further clock or similar), symbolising a particular kind of working identity. This also links to Polly's narrative in *Performing in the Circle: Rounding up the Ladies for the Company* when she talks of receiving a figurine which felt very much like a long term service award. It would seem in Jack Foster's case that the accumulation of objects for long service and retirement symbolise a rich accumulation of experience and pride which he wishes to hand down to his son and feels he is now being prevented from achieving. As Moen (2001: 185) points out 'Control over the timing of retirement is important for subsequent well-being'

and 'the evidence suggests that retirement planning is positively related to retirement satisfaction and well-being'. A lack of control over retirement and the destruction of Jack's carefully-made retirement plans add to his and his wife's distress about the closure of Shelton Bar, and create concern for their future and that of younger generations.

Mrs Timmis's rhetorical question about how a man of 50, with only 15 years working life ahead of him, can plan again for the future, has powerful resonances with today's social and political environment and the impact of recession on 'older workers'. Her line 'Well, I mean, there isn't work for these young 'uns now, what chance is there for them when they're 50!' could have been spoken by someone talking today. Surveys of workers in the 1990s suggest that discrimination against older workers was commonplace, that most private and public employers were doing relatively little to address the issue and that many did not envisage doing so in the future (Thompson 1991; Taylor and Walker 1994; Arrowsmith and McGoldrick 1996). Research has also demonstrated that many employers hold negative attitudes towards older workers (Taylor and Walker 1994). There are resonances too with the various changes to pension systems currently being introduced by the coalition government and the shifts in pension expectations which the families of Shelton Bar were going through in 1974.

Whilst Mrs Timmis and Mrs Whalley are worried about their husbands being able to gain future employment after the age of 50 they are also concerned about their children who are doing apprenticeships. The closure of the Bar will mean a loss of employment across generations and an acceptance that as mothers they will be responsible for 'tightening the

belts' of the family and managing on a lot less money, taking an economic step backwards which they were not expecting and had planned throughout their life-courses in order to avoid.

5.10.2 Family and Intergenerational relationships

Family as a locus for intergenerational relationships is a further theme which comes through these narratives as introduced above. For Chris the idea of family is one which he links to the Vic theatre and to Cheeseman, who becomes a father figure (possibly one which he found affirming after his severe homesickness when first leaving home at 18). Chris is able to have a number of disagreements with Cheeseman throughout his career and still feel that he can 'return home'. Home and family would seem to be interconnected within the Vic for Chris. Ann Oakley observes that 'the home is the family [and that] "home" and "family" are now virtually interchangeable terms', that it is the home which contextualises familial experiences (Oakley quoted in Allan and Crow 1989: 2). For Chris the Vic theatre constitutes home and Cheeseman as the head of this home takes on the father's role irrespective of the fact that he was only 11 years older.

Cheeseman's retirement and death mark significant points within Chris's life-course. Cheeseman's retirement means that a new theatre director takes over the New Vic and, as Chris states, 'you know this is the way theatres work, the new regime brings in their own people, so that was the end for me.' His time at the Vic is brought to an end along with Cheeseman's reluctant departure. Cheeseman's death is also significant for Chris. He was at the bedside shortly after his death, and says 'he's lying there and I'm starting to free myself.' Chris

was deeply upset by Cheeseman's death but also recognises in himself a sense of freedom being gained, a sense of release from the expectations put upon him by this demanding and authoritarian father figure.

The theme of family and intergenerational relationships continues to be highlighted through the narratives of the Shelton steel workers and their wives. Ernie Landon, who is retired, follows Chris. He sets out the centrality of Shelton Bar to his family history. He measures his own longevity to that of his Grandfather and his Uncle John, 'forced' to retire after 60 years. Placing his story here illustrates the pride of a man able to follow his forefathers, and work until retirement. The subsequent narratives come from older employees and their wives who were still working at Shelton and anticipating retirement but who might now face the loss of work, self-respect and achievement as a result of redundancy. Their sons will not be able to tell stories of their fathers' retirement and years of service at the Bar.

5.10.3 Understandings and Representations of age

Age in relation to self and others is important to Chris; it would appear to be a way for him to compare and contrast his own life experiences and life-course with that of others. Chris makes it clear that Cheeseman was 11 years older than him. He makes a similar point when talking about his age in relation to Albert Cooper and again about Robert Powell, commenting in a line omitted from the play, 'But he's my age; he's about one year younger'. Age-cohort can also be considered in relation to the 'playing age' of an actor, which was discussed in the methodology section of this thesis. Coupland, Coupland and Giles (1989) discuss two functions

of the disclosure of chronological age in older adulthood. They suggest that first it serves a disjunctive function, positively contrasting current health status with what might be subjectively expected (e.g., 'I'm doing well for 65'). Second, it serves an accounting function, explaining a negative state as a function of age (e.g., 'I don't have as much energy as I used to have; at 65, you can't expect too much'). Coupland et al. note that accounting and disjunction both serve self-presentation functions for the individual. The speaker is framed as doing either better than, or at least as well as can be expected given their age. However, both draw on an underlying presumption of decline that occurs with age – they reinforce assumptions about ageing and decline. Although Chris does not obviously use his age disclosure in either of these ways, he is making comparisons with other individuals who he is aware the interviewers are familiar with and is therefore creating a comparison in their minds which clearly exists within his own. The ageing and decline narrative which Chris associates with is further reinforced by the time he spends with his own ageing mother and his partners ageing parents. Linking to this is Chris's response to retirement. The respect he has gained from the students at Staffordshire University has enabled him to retain his self-esteem and create a positive self-identity. His past experiences have been acknowledged and appreciated across generations enabling Chris to maintain a positive self-image of his own ageing. Now that he has left the University he begins to find it difficult to maintain this positive image and recognises that his intergenerational relationships are now only with older people.

The theme of representation with relation to age and older members of the community is highlighted through Chris's narratives. For Chris the documentary dramas of the Vic have had a large impact. Playing the part of Harry Sharratt (a First and Second World War veteran) in *The*

Knotty, having interviewed him for the documentary, and having him sitting in the audience in tears during the production, are memories that have stayed with Chris. The Vic theatre allowed the actors to see the audience very clearly (more so than in the New Victoria theatre, which is perhaps one reason why the actors felt a certain loss of connection with the audience and local community once the new theatre opened). Chris's story of Harry Sharratt stimulates him to describe the documentaries as a 'celebration' of 'ordinary folks'' lives. In a similar way this play celebrates Chris's life and the lives of the other participants within this piece of documentary drama and in so doing offers narratives which reinforce ageing as a phase within the life-course and one which is affected by the transition into retirement and the social, political and personal circumstances surrounding this transition.

Prior to his interview Chris had been considering how the documentaries created a link from the past to the present and how his own involvement and life-course had allowed that connection to continue into the future. He is aware that he has played a part in making the ordinary extraordinary and in enabling these 'ordinary' people's stories to be heard by future generations.

5.10.4 Understandings of Community

Chris uses reflexivity within his narratives, making links and contrasts between the community in which the theatre sat and the familial community of the theatre. For Chris his first impressions of Stoke are not all good. It was 'so different' and 'it smelt terrible and in the winter it's appalling, you couldn't see across the road, got terrible colds all the time.' The world Chris has entered is unlike the world he has been part of before, having been brought up in the south of England. His memories are uncertain as he describes his arrival by train which he remembers as being a steam train but then questions the reliability of his own recollection. As Steedman observes: 'memory alone cannot resurrect past time because it is memory itself that shapes it, long after historical time has passed' (1986: 29). Chris's 'historical narrative' may not be accurate as he has shaped this through memory. He moves on to contrast this with his impressions and feelings about the theatre which are quite different. From this industrial, inward-looking, dirty, small town he becomes part of a new world within the theatre, 'a strange place' but one of 'the absolute present' and one which is a great escape from his strict upbringing during the 1950s. Chris's impressions of the community of Stoke and the community of the Vic seem to be in significant contrast to one another which is possibly one reason why Chris moved out of the area, to Leicestershire, after his first few years at the Vic and though he continued to work at the Vic on and off until Cheeseman's retirement he never returned to live in Stoke. Chris links this need to escape from the area to his cultural and regional roots saying that

it's as if I always had a need to come from the outside all the time. Sounds odd doesn't it? About that area, Stoke and stuff, don't know what it is but there you are. Maybe I'm a southerner, I don't know maybe it's something to do with cultural thing.

Chris seems able to separate his unpleasant surroundings from his experiences of the theatre. Yet he does go on to say, when talking about the local community immediately around the theatre, 'I just loved it and there was a relationship with the people around, you know there was the newspaper shop that was on the other side of the road'. He seems to accept and acknowledge the positive aspects of the immediate community around the theatre, describing it in a similar way to Romy and Polly and going on to say that

there was a kind of relationship, cos time does change things, but with the people around where that theatre was, at the bottom of Victoria Street in Hartshill, you know, there was the funeral director who did the laying out of bodies who used to be there, there was a pub called the Old House at Home, still called that, that was our pub, my home really, and she used to bring kind of steak and kidney puddings over when you came in at 10 o'clock, after a show.

This part of Chris's narrative is not included in the play as I was focusing the narrative thread of the play around the life-course and working towards retirement but an equal narrative thread could have been the link between the theatre and the local community. In the quote above it is interesting to see the links which exist between Chris's narrative and those of Romy and Polly which were included in *Rounding up the Ladies of the Company*. The pub is again talked of as a friendly and homely environment in which the community of the Vic and the local community mixed and accepted one another. The 'house at home' pub encapsulates the concept of the pub as a home environment and one in which they would all congregate.

5.10.5 Reflections on Process

Having discovered the thematic threads discussed above within the narratives of Chris and within the archival narratives I created a play which tied these together by juxtaposing parts of the narratives which resonated with one another. I will now discuss issues relating to the creation of the play which have not already become part of this thematic analysis. The play that I have constructed takes the interview out of series and re-presents it in a narrative structure following Chris's life-course from arrival at Stoke to retirement (with a few jumps backwards and forwards as Chris makes sense of his present in relation to his past). In presenting the narrative in this way I am using narrative analysis to make connections and make some new sense from the narratives (Polkinghorne 1995). The juxtaposition of the stories from the older employees at Shelton Bar and their wives encourages the reader/audience to make connections and contrasts between and within individual's past and the present experiences and echoes the structure of the original documentary.

I began the play with Chris's desire to tell his own story. In creating this play I have gone some way to fulfilling this wish though I have clearly focused his narrative through my own lens, thus it becomes more of a biography than an autobiography. The play uses three 'Chris' characters representing his life-course progression, just as there were two Ruths in the autoethnography. This 'split' presentation of Chris is also representational of the 'roles' he has taken in life; the 'schizoid personality' which he talks about within the play and the loss of self which he reflects on as an outcome of acting.

Chris was sent the finished play and responded by saying that it was fascinating and signing himself 'Chris 1, 2 and 3!'. Unfortunately I received no further feedback from him though his subsequent involvement in the early stages of the Ages and Stages production would imply that he was interested in the project and that he was comfortable with making links between his life-course, the documentaries and ageing.

Polly Warren again becomes a thread throughout the chapter as she can be heard within the voiceover interviews. I include her 'incongruous' voice here as a link back to the first play in this chapter and to Ken's narratives tying the Vic and the documentary to the steel works. The play finishes with a verse from a song written by Romy for the original documentary which was dedicated to Mr Whalley, one of the participants included here in my play. It is a song which brings together the 'characters' from this play and ties them in with the loss of Shelton Bar, the loss of their beloved jobs and their ageing identities.

5.11 Conclusion

The chapter has been presented as a layered methodological bricolage in order to allow each section to comment upon the other. Each of these layers adds to my thesis offering alternative ways of viewing the material and thus alternative ways of reading narratives of the life-course, ageing and intergenerational relations within *Fight for Shelton Bar!* The source analyses explore material which was omitted from the original documentary but which suggests the importance of older members of the community and of intergenerational relationships to

the research team and which are held within the archive as a further iteration of the community's stories as represented within the documentary.

Fight for Shelton Bar! and the narratives contained within this chapter primarily offer a view of the early life-course of the Vic theatre. They follow the life of the theatre and of Cheeseman through to his retirement and death but they focus on the years when the company was young and beginning to carve a place for itself within the community of Stoke. The following chapter, on *Nice Girls*, will re-visit this part of the theatre's history through the 'characters' of Cheeseman and Steve Granville but will move the theatre forward into its next phase of the life-course as the New Vic with its shifting links to the community. The thesis will move onwards to answer the research questions by exploring narratives of performers and documentary sources who were involved with the theatre for a shorter period and who have alternative narratives of their own to tell through the documentary, often clashing with the narratives which Cheeseman and his research team wish to focus on. In addressing the research questions, this thesis will move onto consider the impact of working on *Nice Girls* in relation to individuals' lives and their engagement with their community and to suggest what narratives of the life-course, ageing and intergenerational relations *Nice Girls* reveals.

Chapter Six

Nice Girls: Representation and Transitions

6.1 Setting the scene

In this chapter I continue to conduct thematic analyses of the narratives of my participants (Brenda Proctor, Rose Hunter, Steven Granville, Alice Arnold and Charlotte Barker) by creating further dramatic scripts based verbatim on their transcribed interviews, followed by critical commentary on these plays and the narratives within them. These scripts and analyses uncover how participants' life-courses and ageing are impacted by their involvement with *Nice Girls*. As with Chapter Five, the scripts and analyses are juxtaposed with textual source analyses of the original production adding to the thesis by exposing and discussing what stories were not adopted but remained within the archive. All layers of this chapter suggest links through *Nice Girls* to ageing, the New Vic theatre and the community, with specific focus on representation and transitions in middle to later life. The narratives and themes offered in this chapter are familiar to those discussed in Chapter Five but with a new slant, adding to the thesis by introducing new themes as well as expanding and developing previously discussed thematic strands.

The play within this chapter is entitled *Nice Girls Round the Corner* and is divided into three scenes: the beginning, the middle and the end. All three scenes are framed by Steve Granville's life-course narrative in relation to the Vic and New Vic theatres. If the piece were to

be performed I would expect it to be performed as a whole in order to highlight the shifts that take place in the life-courses of those involved as well as the connections that occur throughout those life-courses. The scenes from the original documentary, which form the source analysis phases of the chapter, follow on from my own play and are taken from the beginning and the end of the production. Both scenes were chosen because of their significance and were mentioned as important during my interviews with the actresses and/ or the women activists. The material in the archive which the source analyses draw from are entitled 'MUSH' referring to the provisional title of the documentary taken from 'Operation Mushroom', the covert name which the women had given the occupation.³¹

This chapter begins with the first scene from the play, *Nice Girls Round the Corner: The Beginning*, which develops new representational issues from the perspective of the performers and the participants. It addresses different kinds of beginnings at the theatre and highlights documentary as a political tool linking both to issues of representation. The chapter moves on to the second scene of the play *Nice Girls Round the Corner: The Middle* and advances the thesis by exploring the shifts in understandings of community which the move from Vic theatre in Hartshill, Stoke to New Vic theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme created. The problematic nature of 'community' is further developed in relation to the women activists and their relationship to the documentary. The scene also continues to look in more depth at theatrical representation and highlights the difficulty of working with the 'Stoke method', especially in its strict adherence to the use of verbatim actuality. The final scene from *Nice Girls Round the*

³¹ Mushroom referred to the shape of the tower that the women were planning to occupy.

Corner: The End extends the thesis by exploring the effects ageing has had on the careers of the performer-participants (Steve Granville, Alice Arnold and Charlie Barker). Ageing and creativity are linked together within this scene discussing the relativity of ageing within a performance setting and performers' aspiration to remain creative without the repetition and hard slog involved in repertory performance. The scene explores gendered transitions, within middle age, required in order to retain or create a positive sense of self in older age.

The chapter continues with a source analysis of one of the key scenes 'Wilkinson' (see Appendix 6.1). It explores the planning phase of the women's pit occupation looking at the importance of the women's political narratives alongside stereotyped roles and counter narratives (Andrews 2002). The analysis further explores family in relation to intergenerational issues and discusses differences in treatment and understandings of community which this documentary offers. It concludes by discussing memory in relation to the original archived interviews and the contemporary interviews which I carried out. The final phase of this chapter contains a second source analysis focusing on the final speeches of the documentary (which are included in full in the section). The speeches allow the women activists to put their political points to the forefront of the documentary's narrative, expressing opinions relating to intergenerational relationships, family and community. The source analysis explores these themes within the biographical narratives of the women which were carried out as part of the research process and which remain in the archive; continuing the use of a life-course perspective in order to better understand the ageing of the individuals involved.

Nice Girls moves way from the male-dominated stories of *Fight for Shelton Bar!* Here Cheeseman is no longer replacing the age-old tradition of old men telling stories. It is now the prerogative of the women to continue the tradition of communal stories. The narratives are from the women's perspective as is highlighted by the individuality of the female parts within the documentary. This chapter aims to provide a number of windows into the lives of both the women and Steve Granville privileging the life-courses and ageing of the participants involved.

Nice Girls (1993) differs significantly from *Fight for Shelton Bar!* (1974) in how it uses the theatre company, the theatre it was created for and performed in, the sources' knowledge of the documentary 'tradition' and the documentary process which led to its creation. My own methods for this chapter have been nuanced by these differences. The life-course of the theatre had moved on between these two performances. The company and Cheeseman had designed, built and relocated to the New Vic theatre, now situated in Newcastle-under-Lyme rather than Stoke. The repertory system was still operating at the New Vic but company members tended to stay for shorter periods of time and were employed for a specific season or even for a specific production. However, although the 'resident' company was breaking up, with only very few actors, such as Steven Granville, being kept on as semi-permanent members, many company members were invited to return to the theatre on a regular basis and the sense of a 'family' which was so apparent during the 1970s was still in existence. Nonetheless, there were also productions, such as *Nice Girls*, which demanded that new faces come into the theatre. Many productions had to have smaller casts due to funding cuts and thus the permanent company, which was employed per season and performed in all productions, was no longer financially viable.

The documentary creation process had also shifted quite significantly between 1974 and 1993; again this is partly due to the loss of a permanent company. Company members were no longer able to take part in long research processes whilst taking a break from or taking a smaller part in the current performance. The majority of the background research for the *Nice Girls* documentary was therefore carried out by Cheeseman and the transcriptions completed by Cheeseman, Rob Swain (associate director at the New Vic at the time) and the production assistant. This loss of a large research team meant that Cheeseman's desire to retain a polyvocality within the documentaries became more problematic. Graham Woodruff points out that 'The fact remains that the smaller the research committee got, the more efficient it became' (Woodruff 1995: 115). The changes he refers to had been occurring since the beginning of the documentaries in 1964. Woodruff goes on to say that 'Cheeseman considers that one of the most satisfactory committees was for *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, which had a committee of four, including himself' (Woodruff 1995: 115). It is probable that Cheeseman would have liked a bigger research team for *Nice Girls* and more involvement from the actors but clearly this was not possible in the financial climate. Unlike most of the other earlier documentaries, *Nice Girls* was performed with a cast of only five: the four actresses plus Steve Granville, who took all of the male parts. It is a sign of the state of funding for the theatre at this time that such a small cast was used. Professor Tony Jackson points out during an interview for Radio Four about regional repertory theatre during the early 1990s that 'so many theatres were constrained, having to do formulaic plays with small companies or not produce their own work at all' (Jackson 2011). It is remarkable then that the New Vic attempted a documentary in

this financial climate and not surprising that its cast was smaller than previous documentaries and that its research process was affected by this.

It was not only the shift in the research team structure which altered the documentary process but also Cheeseman's desire to maintain the authenticity of the source material. During the research process of the third documentary produced by the Vic theatre (*The Knotty* [1966]), participants were invited into the theatre to talk directly to the actors (Cheeseman 1993), and this process was repeated for *Hands Up – For you the War is Ended!* [1971] and for *Fight for Shelton Bar! Nice Girls* shows a significant development of this technique. It would appear that preliminary interviews with Gina Earl, Bridget Bell, Rose Hunter and Brenda Proctor were used as background material by Cheeseman and that they enabled him, along with the diary they kept whilst occupying the pit head, to put together a detailed outline of the narrative structure of the documentary which he then filled out during rehearsal by asking the women to recount certain parts of their story in their own words and transcribing this in order to mould the final script. Cheeseman states: 'We not only recorded the quartet remembering the events, but recorded them in rehearsal recalling as exactly as possible what they said to each other and of course invited them to check the scenes when they had been rehearsed' (Cheeseman 1993: 6).

Within *Nice Girls* Cheeseman shifted the documentary process to involve, almost exclusively, autobiographical material from the women, which he then shaped into the documentary. Stanley (1992) points out that both biography and autobiography are not factual, they 'are by nature artful enterprises which select, shape and produce a very unnatural product, for no life is lived quite so much under a single spot-light as the conventional form of

written autobiographies suggests' (4). Whilst *Nice Girls* is not a conventional, written biography or autobiography, Cheeseman still requested the women to tell and re-tell their stories in such detail that they became an 'unnatural product' of lives lived under a spot-light. I return to this idea in the analysis of narrative following the play scenes.

The interviews I carried out with Rose and Brenda show that this was a process with which they were happy: The women had previously worked with Banner theatre company to create a number of musical pieces created from 'actuality' and were familiar with documentary as a tool to help them with their political fights. They embarked on the documentary with a specific intention, and knowledge gained from experience which enabled them to argue their points with Cheeseman. It was the songs (written by them before embarking on the documentary) which they felt very strongly about and argued for the inclusion of, without amendment. By holding onto the songs, in full, the women felt that the documentary would retain and highlight their political views/aims, which Cheeseman chose not to focus on within the rest of the production. Cheeseman draws the audience's attention to this in the programme to *Nice Girls*, saying of the women 'Characteristically outspoken, they have insisted that we perform their songs intact or not at all' (Cheeseman 1993: 7). He explains his reasoning behind not making the production too Party political in an interview carried out by Woodruff for an article published in *New Theatre Quarterly*:

I suppose what I didn't want it to be was what I call 'political claptrap' – just routine political slanging of the 'fucking Tories'. It seemed to me that here was a story. I said to the women 'look, I believe with any luck we'll get an audience here which you wouldn't get to a political rally or one of your singing concerts[...]but people who might go and say, 'oh, is that what happened?' In other words, you'll get a hearing because of your courage and your fortitude and your wit and not

because you say 'the fucking Tories are this, that, and the other, Heseltine's a twerp, and Major's an empty-headed nit', all that sort of thing, most of us just switch off at that.' (1995: 118 – original punctuation)

For Cheeseman, the women's forceful political stance was off-putting. It would not bring support from the wider 'community' and would cause many to feel that they were being 'told stories' which they did not want to hear and could not associate or agree with. As Plummer points out, 'for narratives to flourish there must be a community to hear [...] for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics' (1995: 87). Cheeseman's aim in focusing on the women themselves was not apolitical but rather to allow the community (in the form of the audience) to understand these women, to listen to their stories and ultimately to invite acceptance of or agreement with their cause.

In the programme to the 1993 production Cheeseman states that the transcriptions were 'gradually compiled into a script by Peter Cheeseman, by the women occupiers themselves and by the cast in and out of rehearsal' (Cheeseman 1993: 3). Whilst it is clear that the words used in the script are the women's and that they did have a large input in the creation of the piece, it is not so clear that the cast had such an input into the creative process. The *Nice Girls* company was taken on a trip to view the location of the women's occupation at Trentham Colliery, but it would appear that for this documentary the importance was placed on the actresses getting to know and become familiar with the women they were about to represent on stage. They were encouraged to socialise together, going bowling and sharing a meal at one of the women's houses. Unlike the cast of *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, the actresses played only one part during the documentary; it was important that they could represent their

‘Nice Girl’ as ‘realistically’ as possible. My own interview with Alice and Charlie shows that the actresses’ appearance was very important to Cheeseman: they needed to resemble the women they were portraying and they were encouraged to get to know the way the women moved and spoke in order to re-create them on stage. However, Cheeseman still used distancing techniques, such as voice-over and having characters speak in the third person. The use of mimesis as a way to help the audience identify with the characters is a shift in the techniques Cheeseman used for *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, whilst the move from the ensemble production to something more like a character study also related to the financial context. The tension between a ‘realistic’ portrayal and a re-presentation of the women became more problematic and led to issues of dissatisfaction on the part of the women-sources. These are discussed in the analysis of narrative.

The chapter’s focus on representation and transitions through the lens of *Nice Girls* highlights the differences between the two documentaries and progresses the thesis by offering the new thematic strands relating to representation and further developing those of community, family and intergenerational relationships which were initially discussed in relation to *Fight for Shelton Bar!*

6.2 *Nice Girls Round the Corner: Preface*

We only act as storytellers, the advocates for the people who lived the events. You must be able to see the truth behind our tale[.] (Cheeseman 1993: 4)

This statement, included in the programme for *Nice Girls*, fits equally well for my own play and the subsequent analysis. In creating the play I have produced a narrative analysis

which juxtaposes the experiences of the actors and the participants of *Nice Girls*, highlighting the similarities and the differences in their life-course experiences through the lens of their connections to the New Vic theatre. The analysis which follows offers a further explanation of the resonances within the participant's narratives, which my own play has developed.

Steve Granville's narratives frame the other narratives at the beginning and end of each play within this chapter. In this way I highlight the different investment each participant made in the Vic/New Vic and the *Nice Girls* documentary. Steve's narratives highlight the experiences of someone whose life-course has been entirely bound up with the Vic/New Vic. I juxtapose this with the experiences of actresses whose life-courses were only briefly intertwined with the New Vic, but who yet admit that the experience had a lasting effect on them, and with the women participants whose life-course was also touched by the theatre and the documentary. In order to understand the intersection between the life-courses of the participants and the Vic/*Nice Girls* documentary, I am interested in the entire life-course of the participants. I follow this through all three plays within this chapter. For Steve Granville this life-course approach has taken the form of a story moving from his first experiences of the Vic theatre and documentary drama, through his near breakdown whilst working at the Vic (shown in the second play in this chapter), to his leaving the theatre and the transitions which he went through whilst searching to replace the adult life-narrative of 'working at the Vic', which is all he knew (shown in the third play of this chapter).

For the actresses, Alice Arnold and Charlotte Barker, the life-course narratives have primarily focused on their involvement with theatre and acting, and their transitions from this. For the women of the North Staffs Miners Wives' Action Group, Brenda Proctor and Rose

Hunter, the focus of their narratives are still much the same as they were for the original documentary. They are still political, working-class women who, whilst appreciating the documentary for the recognition it gave to them, and for the skill with which it was created and performed, are aware that it was only one 'project' within a whole string of activities which they undertook and are still undertaking in support of causes which they feel are 'right'. The women were operating on the edge of mainstream society and as such consider themselves to be a marginalised group whose voices were not heard as clearly as dominant political discourses of the time. Delgado suggests that 'the stories, or counter-stories,³² which members of out-groups tell to themselves and others, help to document, and perhaps even validate, a "counter-reality"' (Delgado 1995: 64). The women (and Cheeseman) are telling a counter-story through the documentary, and Cheeseman aims to validate this by presenting it as a personal story told by the community to that community. In a similar way Andrews (2002) suggests that 'counter-narratives, like the dominant cultural narratives they challenge, might be experienced and articulated individually, but nonetheless they have common meanings' (2). The women have spent much of their life-courses telling and re-telling these counter-narratives, using many different methods. The documentary is a further method, which Cheeseman aims to present in a way which is accessible to those who are not part of this outside group.

³² Counter-stories – defined, drawing on the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, s.v. counter-, *prefix*), as alternative or opposing narratives or explanations – are narratives which stand in opposition to narratives of dominance or 'grand narratives' which carry multiple layers of assumptions that serve as filters in discussions of ageism, racism, sexism, classism, and so on.

The song *Nice Girls*, which was taken from the repertoire of the Miners Wives' Action Group Choir and is performed towards the end of Act One of the documentary, sums up the women's driving focus for their counter-narratives:

What's a nice girl like me doin' in a place like this?
 And the answer comes back loud and clear
 I fight for right, that's what it is.
 I know exactly why I'm in a place like this. (Cheeseman1993: 6)

The women are aware that as activists they are often acting outside of the law and are likely to suffer the consequences of their actions, and yet they believe that their actions are worthwhile, that their role as working-class activists means that standing up for the rights of their fellow working-class men and women is worth the sacrifice and that their counter-narratives deserve to be heard and indeed must be heard.

Most participants in this play, and particularly the actors, mentioned the impact that working in-the-round had on the documentary and on them as actors, and it is for this reason that the play was again written for the New Vic stage and that the stage directions refer to this venue. Having worked in stage management at the New Vic, where one of my jobs was to mark up the movements or blocking of the performers during rehearsal, I am very familiar with the stage and the theatre's potential as a performance space, and thus my stage directions within this play are quite specific and as much a part of the 'narrative analysis' as the words. I hope that readers of the play can visualise the action on stage; to help with this process I have included two images of the stage within appendix 6.1.

6.3 Nice Girls Round the Corner: The Beginning

The Characters:

Steve (A retired actor): A man in his early 60's; plays the part of himself and other roles as required

Charlie (A retired actress): a woman in her late 40's; plays the part of herself and of Rose, who is one of the women participants from Nice Girls, and other roles as required

Alice (A retired actress): a woman in her late 40's; plays the part of herself and all other roles as required

Sue (An actress): a woman in her early 60's; plays the part of herself and of Brenda, who is one of the women participants from Nice Girls, and other parts as required

Brenda: (A political activist): A woman in her early 60's. She is played by Sue

Rose: (A political activist): A woman in her early 50's. She is played by Charlie

Steve (who is in his teens) enters from DL as if he is an audience member and stands on the stage looking around the auditorium as if he has never seen it before. He takes out his ticket and looks at the seat number and the auditorium trying to work out where his seat is.

Steve: I am guessing it was 1966,

And it was a production of The Knotty.

I saw two productions, two documentaries,

One was The Burning Mountain,

Which when I first saw it didn't understand a word of it,

And then I saw The Knotty.

I was brought over from Bradford

By my school teacher to see these documentaries –

Steve now unrolls his programme of The Knotty and looks at it while he moves to UC auditorium, he nearly falls up the auditorium stairs as he is so engrossed in the programme and then sits on the third row next to a member of the 'real' audience – he acknowledges the audience member and shows them his programme

I sat in the auditorium

And I was an avid train spotter when I was much younger -

Two of the actresses appear up the DR Vom with two planks of wood and mime the actions as described by Steve. The sound effect of a steam train happens as Steve describes it. They circle the stage and exit DL

There was these two actors who went to the side

In the entrance way

And it was part of the documentary style,

When you weren't on stage, you actually could,

You could walk down the entrances

And lean on the side and watch what was going on

Then when it was your bit you'd walk on stage.

So the audience totally ignored them,

But they had their arms on the side of this wood,

Then this sound of the steam train came on

And these two actors just left their arms where they were,

Walked on stage as a steam train.

I thought, 'Oh, how marvellous'.
 All it was, was a bare stage with a floor cloth
 And actors and the odd chair and odd little bits of things
 But the actors brought them on,
 Took them off
 And it just struck me
 And I was mesmerised by it.
 When the performance had finished
 We were sat in the audience,
 We didn't leave when all the others did,
 We just sat there,
 Thinking someone would come and say
 'Would you mind moving?'
 And they didn't
 And we were all just fascinated by the theatre
 And the magic of it all,

One actress enters from UC Vom, and the two actresses who have
 just been the train enter from DL. They are chatting and have
 their scripts in their hands; one also carries a small stool and
 moves to DC area sitting on the front row of the audience seating.
 Steve now becomes Peter, he moves from his seat in the
 auditorium and takes the small stool from one of the actresses
 and sits on it as he describes this happening.

And all these actors came out,
 They sat at the far end,
 Peter came out

Put his little stool down,
 Sat on his stool
 And he started giving them notes
 And he became aware
 And I always remember,
 Peter, he looked round and I thought
 'This is it, he's going to say "Excuse me, would you mind?"' (laughs)
 And then carried on,
 Just carried on giving notes
 And you felt quite privileged to sit there
 And see a director giving notes to the actors –
 Little did I know then that eventually
 I would be one of the actors
 Sat there getting these notes from Peter,

Alice and Charlie now stand and move onto CS while Steve moves
 to sit on one of their auditorium seats with Sue.

Alice: I was literally,
 Staying with a friend who was working there
 And I went to see their play,
 Which I think was Good Golly Miss Molly and Peter Cheeseman...
 I went to see Mark Fisher, who was the MP for Stoke,
 Whose daughter is a great friend of mine, erm,
 So I went to their house
 And Peter happened to be there
 And he said to me

(in Peter's voice) 'What do you do?' (laughs)

Charlie: with his usual tact (laughs)

Alice: and I said 'What do you mean?

(in Peter's voice) 'Do you act?'

And I said

'Well, yes, that is sort of what I do'

And he just thought I looked absolutely like Bridget

And he said

'I want you to be in this thing'

I want you to be in this thing, in this play,

Because you are the dead ringer

And I hadn't auditioned or anything.

I just got it purely because I looked like Bridget.

That was probably the weirdest circumstance

That I ever got a job was by that.

How about you?

Charlie: Mm, so I got it in the normal way.

I really can't remember whether I auditioned for it or not.

Or whether I just went and met Peter

Or whether I didn't and the casting director just went and said,

Alice: You'll do

Charlie: You know,

She looks a bit like her,

I don't really look like Rose though, do I?

Alice: No.

Charlie: But close-ish.

Alice: None of the others looked like anybody apart from me.

Alice holds out her hand and guides Sue onto the stage who now 'becomes' Bren. Whilst this is happening Charlie goes to the nearest Vom entrance and takes a scarf from the hangers placed at the top of the Vom – she puts it on and 'becomes' Rose. Alice sits next to Steve.

Bren: Yes.

It wasn't so much that she didn't look like me

But that she whinged.

Rose: She was nothing like you.

Bren: She didn't have my strength

Rose: No.

Bren: Saying that, Rose'll tell me if I'm not right and that,

But I was strong.

Rose: No you wouldn't have guessed she was playing you,

You wouldn't have guessed she was playing Brenda

Bren: I'm a strong person you know

Rose: I mean Alice looked like Bridget

And got Bridget down to a tee,

Whatserface did Gina pretty well as well.

Bren: Charlie did you ok

Rose: Charlie did me ok,

Although, you know,

Me and Charlie weren't particularly;

Some of the girls were quite close,

Me and Charlie weren't close

But I was happy with how she played me,

But Jane was nothing like you.

Bren: No... she whinged

Rose: She didn't portray you in the whole.

Bren: Yeah.

There was one part in the play

Where I got hit from a bolt

coming down the shaft –

Rose: Christ almighty, yeah!

Bren: And broke my nose, didn't I?

I had me nose broke then but, erm,

Ok, it fell on me nose and I went 'bloody hell'

And it was hurting

But in the play Jane went

Rose: Christ Almighty!

Bren: Uhhhh, ahhhh (makes long drawn out pain noises).

All this crying

Rose: Calm that down.

There was no need for all that

Bren: That wasn't me, you know.

A diary is dropped from the lighting grid landing close to Brenda, who protects her nose. Rose moves over to Brenda and inspects her nose. Brenda brushes Rose's hand away and they both laugh.

Rose moves over to the diary, which has fallen in front of them,
and picks it up.

Rose: The idea just came up in front of us really.

We weren't expecting,

Well, I wasn't expecting it really.

Bren: I think what it was we kept a diary of everything.

We kept a diary of everything from day one.

You know

(She takes the diary from Rose and shows it to the audience)

Rose: From when we set the pit camp up in January

Bren: And I think Peter read that first, didn't he?

I think he must have seen something in that.

Rose: There was a good story there.

Bren: It was a good story;

There was some funny, sad, emotional,

There was a bit of everything and he saw it,

And he thought

This is one way of carrying on me tradition of local documentary work,

You know.

Cos we got involved,

When we was on strike in '84,

Pete, bless him,

Used to let us take the kids to pantomimes

And stuff for nothing –

Rose: He was always really good

Bren: You know, when we was on strike,
And he was always supportive.
So we had a little contact in there
But I think when he come along and said
'Look, I think this story's part of Stoke's history in a way,
Should be documentaried',
He said 'Why don't we try to put summat together like
Part documentaried, part story.

Rose: Like his Knotty stuff

Bren: And like his Shelton Bar.

And then it's there forever,
You know and that's how it first kicked in really.

Rose: I think he was probably wishing it was the lads who were involved
and not all us lot

Bren: Yeah.

Well it's a major thing as well,
Tell you the truth,
Cos in the mining communities it's male dominated.
I mean this area
And to be fair we were,
The women's group were really strong, so I mean.
I mean there were men involved
In the campaign what we did obviously,
But it was our,

They went by what we wanted you know.

Steve (who now becomes Peter) and Alice (who is now herself) move onto the stage whilst Charlie (as Rose) and Sue (as Bren) move towards the audience one on SL and one on SR, they talk to the audience whilst watching Peter and Alice rehearsing a scene (Peter points at the direction he wants Alice to move, she moves and he then moves over to her and gently moves her in the direction he wants her to go.)

Bren: We used to be there in the day-time

And they used to be doing a scene or something–

Rose: Cos he was quite meticulous in a lot of things wasn't he?

Bren: He used to start up and he'd say

Steve (as Peter): (Peter stops the rehearsal and turns to Brenda)

Brenda, would you have done that?

Would you have said that?

Bren: He would stop them and ask like, you know.

Rose: He was good like that, Pete

Bren: Yeah

Bren: There was certain words, like Rose would say

Rose: 'I would never use that word' or 'I would never do that'

Steve (as Peter) nods and goes back to his mimed rehearsal with Alice, guiding her off the stage down SL Vom – Steve stays at the top of the Vom and 'becomes' himself

Bren: And he changed it, didn't he?

To be fair on him.

Rose: Like I say, the whole process of how he did it,

It was fascinating.

It was like nothing we've ever—
 In that way it's like nothing I've seen before
 Or been involved in and it was,
 It was great.

Rose and Bren follow Steve and Alice off DSL. Steve moves back onto the stage

Steve: So when I was, how old would I have been?

About 19, 20 or something,

I wrote to Peter and said

Can I come and work for you?

And I think it was his wife who wrote back,

Steve takes out a letter from his pocket and moves to DR, and Alice who is now playing Joyce appears at the top of the Vom to join him. She takes the letter and reads it

Joyce, Joyce Cheeseman wrote back, and she said

Alice (as Joyce): (handing the letter back to Steve)

Well, we prefer actors who've been to drama school.

Steve: 'Right', 'fine',

(Steve directs these words to Joyce then moves off around the stage)

So I went to drama school for three years, in London.

When I finished there, I wrote back to Peter and said

'Now can I come and work for you?'

(Steve once again takes out his letter and moves to Joyce who has stayed DL, giving it to her)

And Joyce wrote back and she said

Alice (as Joyce): (handing the letter back to Steve)

Actually we prefer actors with at least two years' experience.

Steve: (Steve takes the letter from Alice and moves once again around the stage)

So I ended up doing children's theatre

Or anything I could get my hands on really.

Then I wrote to him again

(laughs and moves back to Alice handing her his letter once again)

And said

'Right I've two years' experience now,

Can I come and work for you?'

(Alice finally takes the letter and nods at Steve then moves off stage
DL)

And he gave me an audition.

So he gave me a date and time

And I turned up at the Victoria theatre

(Steve has ended up DR at the top of the Vom and Alice now re-appears
as a Vic employee)

Steve: I've come for the auditions.

(Steve hands his letter over to her)

Alice as Vic employee: (looks at letter and then hands it back to Steve)

Oh, they are being held in London.

(She moves to top of DR Vom and becomes Peter)

Steve: (Steve moves to CS as he speaks)

So I went back home to Bradford

And I phoned Peter up and said (mimes a phone in his hand)

'Terribly sorry,

You didn't actually say that the auditions were in London

And I came across to the Vic'.

(Alice as Peter moves to CS with mimed phone in hand)

Peter: Oh, right.

Can you come back tomorrow or Wednesday?

Steve: Oh yes, yes.

(Steve moves back to DR Vom and picks up a coat and script from the top of the Vom, he is joined by Sue who is playing an actor and carrying a script)

Steve: So I travelled all the way back again

And auditioned for him,

There was only two of us,

(Steve and Sue move to CS whilst greeting each other. Alice – who is still Peter– greets them both)

I remember my audition,

I did it with another actor from Drama Centre

And we stood there and he said

Alice (as Peter): Right, off you go.

Steve: (Steve and Sue stand quite close to each other and Peter moves in very close to them both)

So we're reading these lines to each other

And we are about this far apart,

And we stood there and Peter's stood there (laughs)

And I was thinking this is really odd

Cos normally directors stay a few feet away,

But no, no, right next to you

Peter seems to have finished his audition and he gestures for the actors to sit on the CR stairs. They move to the stairs whilst Peter speaks. Peter collects his stool from UC and sits at the bottom of the CR steps all three actors look towards CL watching an imaginary screen

Peter: Right I'll show you some documentary films,

Would you like to see them?

Steve: (To Peter) I certainly would.

So I sat at the back watching

Steve looks fidgety and uncomfortable, looking at his watch and standing. He moves down to Peter

Steve: Oh, I've got to go Mr Cheeseman

Peter: Oh, right, just wait outside for five minutes.

Steve moves to top of UC Vom and waits. Alice (as Peter) stands and shakes hands with Sue, they both exit DL

Steve: Anyway

There was somebody in the company

Who had been in the same drama school as me

And he went and asked her 'what's he like?'

Alice (as Peter) re-enters to top of DL Vom and casually calls across to Steve

Alice (as Peter): Oh, can you start on Monday? (Alice turns and exits DL)

Steve moves to CS

Steve: That's why I always remember it was a Wednesday.

And that was it, for 21 years.

6.4 Analysis of narrative

Steve Granville began his narratives by describing his first experience of the Vic and of seeing a documentary. During his interview he returned a number of times to the impression that this performance of *The Knotty* had on him, and the influence that this experience had on his life-course. It appears to be a fundamental moment in his life. Steve is enchanted by ‘the theatre and the magic of it all’ and this has set his life on the path which he subsequently followed. Steve presents himself in these early career narratives as having to be adaptable and able to cope with very little stability; they have much in common with Alice and Charlie’s narratives within *Nice Girls Round the Corner: The End*, which will be discussed in more detail during the analysis of that scene, and further lead to Steve’s own narrative in *The End*. Steve’s comments also seem to link to the idea of the Vic as a family, linking back to the narratives of those involved in *Fight for Shelton Bar!* His comment ‘and that was it for 21 years’ feels like a comment that could also relate to adoption into a family. Like Romy and Polly, Steve has found the family he feels is the right ‘fit’ for him and has worked hard to become a member of it, jumping through a number of hoops to satisfy the family patriarch. He finally manages to establish his role within this familial community and stays within it for a large part of his life-course.

Alice and Charlie’s narratives also explore how they first became aware of and worked at the New Vic. In contrast to Steve’s very controlled initial employment at the theatre, Alice’s seems very haphazard and unplanned. Cheeseman’s employment of Alice, seemingly based only on her physical and vocal similarity to Bridget (one of the Miners Wives’ Action Group and

a central figure in the documentary), shows how important Cheeseman felt it was that the actors represent the women as ‘truthfully’ as possible. Cheeseman’s casting practice was different for the role of ‘Bridget’ than it was for the role of ‘Brenda’. Jane Wood, the actress who initially played Brenda in the documentary³³ looked nothing like Brenda, was a different size and body shape altogether and she struggled with the Potteries accent, sounding far more West Midlands than Stoke. It is perhaps not surprising in this context that Brenda was not happy and felt that Wood ‘didn’t get her’.

The tension between ‘realism’ and ‘representation’, mentioned earlier in this chapter and discussed in relation to *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, creates a clash between how Brenda views herself and how she views her character on stage, an issue which she found problematic at the time and still struggles with nearly twenty years later. Brenda describes Wood as ‘whingeing’; she does not see herself as capable of acting in this stereotypically feminine way and perceives her ‘true’ self as containing an inner and outer strength which she wanted to be re-presented on stage. She still feels disappointed in her own ‘on stage’ representation without this core strength being apparent to her. Reviews of the production do not criticise Wood’s performance, with all of the actresses being praised for their portrayal of the women. *The Times* (Nightingale 1993) states: ‘By the time they emerge from their ordeal [...] Alice Arnold, Anna Jaskolka and Jane Wood have convinced you of the women’s pluck and resilience’ whilst *The Independent* (Wainwright 1993) states that the actresses ‘carry the show’. It is therefore not an obvious failing on the part of Wood but rather a misalignment between Brenda’s view of

³³ The part of Brenda was originally played by Wood and was later taken over by Sue Wallace for the 1995 trip to Paris as Wood was unable to continue with the role due to other acting commitments.

self and Wood's re-presentation of Brenda's narrative. Lucius Hoene and Depperman (2000) suggest that first-person stories reveal people's claims as to who they are and how they want to be understood, but suggest that what remains uncertain concerns the match between a particular instance of autobiographical story-telling and the totality of the narrative identity of a person. The specific narratives that Brenda has told here, relating to her experiences in the pit head, which Cheeseman has picked up on and used as part of the documentary, have perhaps not allowed the totality of her narrative identity as a person to be seen by the actress. Wood has seen a part of Brenda through her story but not picked up on the strength which Brenda sees as the most important aspect of her self-identity. It is also likely that Wood emphasised aspects of Brenda's narrative for dramatic effect which whilst making the documentary more enjoyable and colourful for the audience did not re-present the 'facts' as exactly as Brenda experienced them. This issue is brought up in Alice Arnold's interview and discussed further later in this chapter.

Rose seems to have been more satisfied with Charlie's representation of her, though she makes a point that she did not form a close bond with the actress. For Rose the relationship between herself and Charlie does not seem as important as the way in which she was represented on stage. Steve later goes on to talk about his feelings about representing people on stage when they are there to see it, saying, 'You were playing them and you had to be truthful and that's what you tried to be, tried to represent those people as honestly as you could'. Steve makes the point that many of the people he was portraying were not familiar with theatre but would be absolutely honest when they came into rehearsal, correcting the actors and attempting to make the performance 'truthful' in their own eyes. Clearly this is

problematic, as this 'truth' is only one person's opinion, but Cheeseman and his company paid respect to this belief and to the participants by listening to their concerns and working to capture the 'truth' as seen through the eyes of those who were being represented. It is interesting, then, that Brenda feels that Cheeseman and the actress initially playing her failed in this respect.

The Vic documentary acting style would seem to have been created in order to acknowledge this respect for the participants and in order to capture the 'real' person. Steve states 'you had to learn to become real, but portray better' (see p.317 below). By becoming 'real' Steve appears to mean that he had to put his learned acting techniques to one side and represent the person in a 'real' way that included speaking over other people, repeating things, including 'um's and 'urr's, acknowledging the audience and using the stage in a natural way.³⁴ Alice and Charlie also commented at length during their interviews on this technique; Alice, for example, says, 'I remember feeling very responsible about representing them [the women], because they were very concerned about how they were represented' (see p. 325 below). This representational issue is discussed further in the analysis of *The Middle*.

Although Cheeseman talks of not wanting to create 'political claptrap' (Woodruff 1995: 118), Rose and Brenda make it clear that Cheeseman sympathised with their political concerns. He had opened the theatre, free of charge, to the children of miners during the 1984/5 strike and had a long affiliation with the Stoke-on-Trent mining community, having worked with them in the 1970s to create a pit-safety show, *Jowl Jowl and Listen Lads!*, and then to create the

³⁴ This final point is far easier to achieve in a theatre-in-the-round as the actor can turn his back on the audience at any time in a way that they would find far more problematic on a proscenium arch stage.

documentary *Miner Dig the Coal* in 1981 (Cheeseman 1993: 4). It is perhaps partly because of these affiliations that Cheeseman seems to have been drawn to this material for his final documentary, but as Brenda points out it was also ‘a good story; there was some funny, sad, emotional [parts].’ Peter can see the theatricality within the events, the appeal of an all-woman fight for their community, which was dominated and, historically, led by men, and the opportunity ‘to reflect the life of the district in such a way that we really believe that we are important and that important things happen here’ (Cheeseman 1988 – Theatre policy statement). As Woodruff (1995: 111) points out, this is ‘all suggesting an interest more precise than “local” or “community”’. Cheeseman is engaged in a battle for recognition on behalf of the working class and suggests that he is offering an alternative narrative for the history books. Brenda has also recognised this historical importance and within the play states ‘then it’s there forever, you know’ when talking about the creation and writing of the documentary. She also tellingly refers to a ‘tradition’ of documentary writing. She is acknowledging an awareness of documentary theatre and its use as a tool for fighting injustice. For Steve the documentaries are also of historical importance; he makes the point that ‘you didn’t start learning the history of the place until you started really doing the documentaries’ (see p.312 below). The documentaries not only made Steve aware of the history of Stoke-on-Trent but they created an alternative history of the area which many of the audience and the performers would not have been familiar with. The documentaries ‘re-present’ history to an audience and it is this re-presentation which allows Cheeseman to be political without getting too involved in Party politics.

6.4.1 Reflections on process

Nice Girls Round the Corner was created in a slightly different manner to the plays in Chapter Five of this thesis. I wanted to echo some of the differences which had occurred in the Vic documentaries and it therefore was important that the play only had a sparse cast (three actresses and one actor). I also felt that as the actresses had 'represented' the women in the original production it would be interesting to repeat the process here as well as have the actresses represent themselves on stage.

The women participants and sources interviewed for this part of the thesis were chosen pragmatically. I was unable to locate Bridget (who had moved out of the area) or Gina (who may well have given me a different story to the other women, having not been an activist prior to this event and having fallen out with the women shortly after the documentary was performed). I was also unable to contact the other actresses from the original production, though I did have a brief telephone conversation with Sue Wallace, who took over the role of Brenda when the production was revived in 1995. As she had not been involved in the research process or the initial rehearsal and creation process, I did not include her narratives in the play, though I did include her as a character, taking the role of Brenda.

Steve was interviewed early in the research process by both me and the Ages and Stages researcher as his involvement with the Vic theatre and Stoke-on-Trent had been such a long one. I re-visited his narratives when I carried out the interviews with the women and actresses one year later, finding resonances and contrasts between them. Steve's narrative is juxtaposed with the narratives of the actresses exploring how they first came to work at the New Vic. It is

important to note that there has been a considerable leap in time, from Steve's first experiences in 1966 to Alice and Charlie's in 1993, although their reminiscences took place within twelve months of each other. I chose not to highlight this temporal difference at this initial point in the play, but have tried to make it clear later in the play. It was also important to show that Steve is still as much a part of the Vic, and indeed more so, in this later era, as he was in 1966 before he was employed by Cheeseman.

The scene opens with Steve's initial experiences of the Vic theatre and of documentary drama and concludes with Steve's narrative of his attempts to get his first job at the Vic. I include a section of the play within which a letter is passed backwards and forwards between Steve and a representative of the Vic. This bit of 'theatrical business' was included to make the scene humorous as well as show the frustration which Steve may well have felt at the time; Steve told his story in a humorous way and I wanted this to come across in the play. I was also aware of mirroring the humour within *Nice Girls*. Steve's future and desired life-course, in a vocational sense at least, seems to be entirely in Cheeseman's hands, and Steve is played with during this part of the scene (just as his letter is), which is the way his narrative resonated with me when I first heard it.

Steve's feedback on the play was quite detailed; this was mainly in order to make better sense of his lines and he suggested adding 'historical detail'. As with Polly's feedback for *Rounding up the Ladies of the Company* Steve was clearly assessing the work as he would have done a Vic documentary and making suggestions which would lead to a production in the same style as Cheeseman's. Steve also pointed out that 'you can only tell what works when you

rehearse the play and start to work on it.’ Whilst this is not possible for this piece of work (at this time) it is something which I accept would be beneficial for a different audience.

The play continues with a scene looking at the middle section of Steve’s life at the Vic, as well as his experiences of working on the documentaries and in-the-round, at how Alice and Charlie experienced the community of Stoke-on-Trent and the micro community of the New Vic and how these perceptions by the actors and actresses connected with the reasons for Brenda and Rose wanting *Nice Girls* to support their political stance and their feelings about the production. The voices of Brenda and Rose here can also be seen as voices from ‘the community’; their focus is often not on the production or the theatre but on their driving political narrative, contrasting with the voices of the actors. The scene describes some of the practical difficulties which the performers faced as well as the benefits of the acting techniques used in Vic documentaries from all three actor’s perspectives as well as looking in more depth at the idea of representing someone who was not only still alive but often in the same room and commenting on the work.

6.5 *Nice Girls Round the Corner - The Middle*

The lights come up and Steve is sitting above the UC Vom on a platform with his legs dangling over the edge as if he is looking out over the whole of Stoke.

Steve: What was Stoke like?

Well, really I was more wrapped up in the theatre,

And you didn’t start learning the history of the place

Until you started really doing the documentaries.
 And slowly, very slowly,
 You start to become integrated into Stoke-on-Trent,
 Although you were from outside,
 And I'd done a lot of history on Bradford and things
 So I started to get interested in Stoke-on-Trent.
 You suddenly thought that this little place
 That was a backwater,
 That I'd never heard of,
 And yet it's got such a rich history about it,
 Even today I am still going out
 And visiting places and finding out,
 You know, what's what,
 How it fitted in with all the historical stuff,
 Changes, and all that kind of thing.

Steve remains on top of the UC Vom as Charlie and Alice enter from DR. They have a drink and scripts in their hands and are just arriving at the theatre for the day. As they come up the Vom one of the theatre Volunteers (Vols) moves up the Vom with them. As they get to the stage the Vol turns and returns to her place at the doors.

Alice: I think that Peter engendered
 An enormous sort of loyalty to the whole place,
 And the fact all these volunteers were there
 And they learned who you were straight away.
 Charlie: His passion was infectious

Alice: And you very much felt this was Stoke.

Stoke was special,

You were at Stoke.

Which I haven't felt at any other Rep I've worked at.

It was about where it was

And there it was in the middle of all of these trees sort of,

You know,

Separate.

Charlie: In the middle of nowhere.

Alice: In the middle of nowhere.

So you couldn't wander to the local shops for lunch.

So you did have all your lunch and everything there.

Charlie: I think that's another thing.

It was very self-contained.

A lot of theatres I've worked at you go out,

You go away and into the town or whatever

Because the theatre itself is usually not terribly nice, um,

Ok so there wasn't really anywhere to go

But the theatre was really nice as well.

The two have been making their way towards UC (which is the 'staff only' exit to backstage) during the previous speech Alice now turns and stands CS looking out at the audience as if they are a football pitch. She holds the scarf she is wearing in the air like a football fan.

Alice: If I was to support football I would probably support Stoke.

Charlie: Yes, I would too!

Alice: I don't feel that about anywhere else that I've worked.

Alice looks a little embarrassed and puts her scarf back on

Charlie: No.

Alice: When people talk about the Potteries I perk up and I think
'Oh I know that, I worked there for ages'.

Charlie: I do too.

(Charlie goes up to a member of the audience and asks the following question)

'What do you want to know?'

(If the audience member asks a question the answer remains the same from Charlie)

I know nothing about them at all actually,

But I feel steeped in it.

Alice: But you felt that with Peter,

Which you don't get with any other theatre.

You were just made to feel that you were a Stoke person

And it was an honour to be there.

Steve: Do you think working on a documentary

About the local community

Helped create that feeling?

The women look up, surprised to see Steve above the UC Vom. It is not clear at this point whether he is playing himself or representing Peter.

Charlie: I think it must have done

Because it linked you to the people.

Alice: Yes. It must have.

Steve has seemingly got his answer now and stands and moves off the platform during the next speeches. He makes his way through the audience and down the CL stairs whilst watching Charlie and Alice on stage but also acknowledging the audience as he goes. In breaks in the dialogue Steve may shake hands with an audience member or even speak to one.

Charlie: I think the audience knew you

And so when I came back to do other shows,

They remembered me,

It seemed like.

And also I think and I hope

That it brought in people to the theatre

Who hadn't been to the theatre before.

Alice: I think it did.

Certainly those first nights

Charlie: And those sort of people came back,

To see something

And recognised you from Nice Girls

Alice: There was that,

In a way very old fashioned,

Because my mother had been in theatre,

(To Charlie) your parents had,

But being in Rep during the war

And that thing that the audience would get to know the actors

Charlie: Oh yes, they love it.

Alice: Rather like being on a soap opera.

Oh yes,

And then you very much feel connected with your audience

In a way that you don't usually in theatre at all.

Charlie and Alice now exit UC as Steve makes his entrance down the CL stairs. The following speech is given whilst Steve is still in the auditorium. He speaks to the audience, looking directly at some members of the audience.

Steve: It was fascinating because

You were actually playing real people,

You were playing them on stage

And they would come and sit in the audience,

Or they would come to rehearsal.

You were playing them and

You had to be truthful and that's what you tried to be,

Tried to represent those people as honestly as you could.

They would turn up and they were absolutely honest with you,

If you hadn't got it right they'd tell you.

Steve now enters the stage area

And it was a different style of acting as well

Because you were representing real people

so in a way all your acting techniques went out the window,

You had to learn to become real but portray better,

People talk over each other,

And that was amazing to do technically,

But they were amazing the documentaries

Virtually ruled my life since I've been 18.

You would get a draft and you would rehearse it

And you'd carry on rehearsing it

And then they would time it

And then they would start to cut it after you'd learnt it.

You'd spend ages learning this scene and they'd say

'Sorry that scene's gone and now you just walk on stage' (laughs).

But I suppose our job

As actors was representing those characters

As truthfully as you could,

And telling the story to the audience.

During the following speech Steve moves around the audience speaking to them

And of course the great thing about theatre-in-the-round was,

Is that you have direct contact with the audience,

So you actually spoke to them,

So a lot of the lines you had to speak you would (pause)

Actually talk to the audience

And that is one of the other great things I loved about the Vic,

Is that you could see the audience.

Steve is now standing UC with his back to UC Vom. He looks out at the DC as if he is on a pros arch stage and moves towards DC whilst attempting to 'look under the lights'

Many years later I was working up in the North East

On a conventional stage,

And I had a speech to the audience and I thought 'oh'

(rubs hands together)

And I looked out towards the audience

And all I got was lights in my eyes,

I kind of ducked down and (laughs)

Went right to the front of the stage

And then I started doing the speech and the director said

'No no you can't do that Steve, you're not lit,

You've got to be lit',

And I said

'Well how can I talk to the audience if I can't see them?'

Of course that was the difference between the Vic

And a normal stage.

Steve is now CS

That's what I loved about the Vic,

Was just the relationship between the audience and the actor,

And of course you meet people afterwards,

In the bar, or down the pub

And they'd just come over and talk to you,

Because you'd talked to them in the audience,

They felt as though they knew you

And because I was there for a long time

And they got used to me on stage.

Steve now spots someone in the audience and nods a hello to them, he walks across the stage towards DR as the next speech progresses

And then you would see somebody in the audience

And before the show,

If you were doing a documentary

You used to walk across the stage at the beginning

To go to your entrance,

You didn't come all the way round the back

And try and hide away,

You'd walk across the stage

And you'd see somebody that was a regular theatre goer

And you'd stop to say

(Steve stops and speaks to an audience member)

'Hello' 'Oh, nice to see you',

(Steve turns from the person he is speaking to and addresses the audience)

Just have a brief little chat and say

(Steve turns back to the person he was speaking to before)

'Oh, see you later'.

(Steve now moves to top of DR Vom)

Then you'd go up and you'd do your entrance.

Then you'd see them in the bar afterwards.

Steve exits DR

Charlie (who plays Rose) and Sue (who plays Brenda) appear at the top of the UC Vom with scripts in their hands. They begin to

walk through the next scene as if rehearsing it, firstly with the scripts and then putting them down and becoming more confident in the characters.

Charlie (as Rose): We didn't want it to be just like

A little story about bored housewives

Getting stuck into sommat

Because we'd been a political action group for the last

How many years?

Sue (as Bren): From '85 the group itself

Rose: From '85, yes,

And all we'd ever did

Has always been thought of as a political act.

Now Gina, perhaps, she got involved because...

Bren: She was fourth choice (laughs).

Rose: There was nobody else (laughs). Yeah,

But that's not to the detriment of Gina.

Bren: The others dropped out at the last minute

Rose: But Gina had to step in –

Bren: To step into a group like us and take us on.

Rose: Yeah, we were strong women who'd set this pit camp up

And we had very clear ideas about how we were gonna do it

And what we were gonna do

And for someone to come in like that and do what she did.

I mean I think it was brilliant, I think she was brilliant,

I mean we had us differences with her.

Bren: Yeah.

Even down to the fact that in the play it got a big laugh

About her coming in her stilettos and silk top, yeah.

Rose: But she actually did.

But she didn't know.

Bren: You know it was like guerrilla war for us,

Camouflage and stuff.

Rose: She thought we were just messing about.

Sue and Charlie return to their scripts to check them, the scene rehearsal is over. Sue waves to Charlie and exits UC. Alice enters UC passing and greeting Sue on the way. Alice moves over to Charlie and looks at her script.

Alice: I can't believe you've got the script.

Charlie: I know, look at that (shows script).

Alice: I remember that.

Charlie: (reading from script) 'In me heads'.

You see we had to say lines that didn't even make sense

Charlie: (reads) 'Yeah, yeah, yeah'.

I had lots of yeah's to start off with

Alice: Yes, you did.

Charlie: (reading from script) 'Men 'ave got, men 'ave got, no, no, do it Bridge you couldn't' (all laugh).

It was really hard to learn.

Which is why I refused to learn anymore a week from the end.

I just said 'I am not learning any more!'

Because, I don't know if it's in here,

It may well be, because I'd learned a massive,

Well you had as well, we all had,

Massive great speeches that were then cut.

Oh page long speeches that got cut.

Alice: I mean Peter had overall editorial control of the shape of the piece

Alice: And then we added speeches in,

Do you remember on the last night?

Charlie: A week before

I refused point blank

'I'm not learning any more, Peter'

I just stared him out.

And then he gave you something in the half –

Alice: Mmhh.

Charlie: Which you had to time with a verse –

Alice: And that was the end of the play!

(laughs) Yes, you're right I did get that at the half.

Charlie: And you timed it

Alice: And I did, yeah, yeah.

God I must have had some skill in those days.

Anyway we did it, didn't we?

But we were at the end of our – because –

Charlie: Yes. It was constantly changing.

Alice: It was scary

I seem to remember us in that rehearsal room in Stoke,

With the women –

Charlie: Often, more often than not.

Alice: And then being told that they had done whatever.

They had gone to, was it called Wilkinson's?

I think of that scene

Because that was a very precise scene,

Which in fact I wasn't in,

But they explained how they did that

And then we took their words from that as well.

I think Peter must have had in the back of his mind,

Or the front of his mind

A sort of structure of where it was going.

Charlie: Yes, he must have.

Alice: Which I'm not sure we appreciated at the time.

Charlie: No. I don't think so.

Alice: Because we were so involved in trying to

Sound like the women –

And get on with the women,

And I think he must have editorially

Been going over it in his head.

'We've got to get them into the pit –'

Charlie: It was his vision and his script,

Albeit their words,

I didn't feel that I had any creative input

Into the writing of the piece at all,
The creating of the piece.
That might just have been me.
My creativity was re-creating a person,
You know
And then re-creating the emotional state
That person was in
At that particular moment of that play.
Which is exactly the same as it would be for any other play.
But that might be just more of the way I come to things.
It might have been me going –
'Well, I'm not a writer so you give me and I'll do'.
Alice: And also at that time,
This was the first production,
We had a lot of time spent with the women,
And I remember feeling very responsible
About that, representing them,
Because they were very concerned
About how they were represented.
They didn't want to come across badly
Or say anything that would upset other people
They had worked with
Or been involved with
And perhaps they were getting too much glory,

You know and all these things.

But then we had more interaction with them at that stage,

A lot of interaction with them and it was

A very difficult path to tread really.

We were representing these women

And if they said something funny

We were wanting to be funny

And if we said something that didn't come across

In the best light

But was funny

They might be quite precious about that.

I mean I remember very clearly the scene in the pit

Much later on.

Bridget said she was eating crisps

And there was a row that went on in that,

Do you remember?

Charlie: I do (laughs).

Alice: And that thing during the scene,

I mean a real row between the women,

And I just took this bag of crisps

Every night and ate them

All the way through this row,

Which didn't reflect very –

And Bridget hated it,

Absolutely hated that scene

And she said

'I wouldn't have sat there and ate crisps,

I wouldn't have done'.

And I said

'But you said that you ate crisps'.

Now there's lots of different ways you can eat a bag of crisps

And I did eat them in a particularly goading fashion.

Charlie: Now, you see, that's where we had to bring the drama.

Charlie and Alice continue to look at the script. Alice then notices the time and stands to leave UC Sue re-enters UC with a bottle of water and her script. She looks at the script and then puts it and the water bottle down out of the way and 'becomes' Bren. Charlie stands, looks at her script then puts it down out of the way and moves her body around in preparation for the next 'rehearsal'. She moves to her starting position CR and 'becomes' Rose.

Rose: So I think that was our dilemma as a group.

Although we knew Pete had a strong political background,

We could see the way it was going

Because we'd worked with Banner,

Banner Theatre,

Who were equally as political as us,

I'd say, aren't they?

Bren: Yes.

Rose: We'd worked with since the 80s

And were on our wavelength.

They could see straight away that Pete was angling it differently
And we were feeling a bit uncomfortable
About how the angle was goin' as well,
Because at the end of the day the bottom line was;
You privatise the coal industry,
Or get rid of the coal industry,
You're going to be importing coal from places
Like South America,
South Africa, Chile and then there's blood on the coal
And that was what our message was,
We wanted that to be our message didn't we?

Bren: Yeah

Rose: Pete's message was like the Song of Bloody Bernadette.

This big strong woman coming along
Or a group of women and overcoming.

Bren: Like the songs and stuff.

There was specific songs
That we wanted to tell our story through
And a lot of these songs were written by Dave Rogers
For the simple reason that we've worked with him for years
And he used to write our words into songs
So whatever we said came out as a song
But some of these songs Peter wanted,
They were like sea shanties

You know (sings in sea shanty manner)

Like they were old folksy stuff,

You know

And we didn't want anything like that.

Rose: We don't do sea shanties.

Sue and Charlie have finished this scene and take a break, moving to their water bottles and scripts. Sue sits and reads through her script while Charlie stands and moves CS 'becoming' herself again. Alice enters from UC with her own bottle of water

Charlie: It took a massive amount of energy.

Alice: We were exhausted.

Charlie: I lost pounds.

I do remember on the first night,

I suppose it was the interval and we went

'My God, its funny'.

We had no idea!

Alice: Yes, yes. I remember that.

And the energy when we were trying to get into the pit,

I do remember it.

Charlie: We were so busy trying to remember what came next

We hadn't noticed it was funny.

I seem to remember the first night

Before we went on saying.

'This could be the worst thing we've ever done,

Let's just see if we can get through it'

And I actually think,
 Because we were so involved in the process
 And usually as an actor you're not so involved in the process,
 Even though I don't think
 I was creatively involved in the process
 I was involved in it
 Because I was in the rehearsal room
 While the process was happening.
 Usually you have an idea.

Alice: But I remember so clearly that,
 When we got off at the interval of the first night and we went
 'Oh my god' –

Charlie: 'Oh my god they're laughing.'

Alice: 'There's a massive reaction to this.'

Alice moves to Sue and sits looking at her script. Charlie takes a final sip of water and puts her script and bottle down and 'becomes' Rose – the 'rehearsal' continues.

Rose: We weren't being awkward
 But there was no point them pretending
 They were doing our story
 When it wasn't our story
 And I think it was probably, had it been now,
 I think we'd have handled it totally differently
 Because, at the time,
 I think we were a bit nervous,

We knew what we wanted

But you're kind of in this theatre situation

With all these theatre-type people

And there's Peter Cheeseman

And you do kind of hold back a little bit

But I don't think we did at the end.

No we were getting really pissed off by the end of it weren't we?

Brenda: I suppose.

Rose: I mean fair play to Peter he must have bin,

I think he was shitting himself by the end of it

Cos he'd got funding to think about

And he'd got all the bigger picture to think about

But we were just thinking about,

We'd got our stuff to think about

And we thought it was just as important.

Sue has got up during this speech and 'become' Bren

Bren: That's why we wanted to write our own to make sure.

Rose: We wouldn't trust anyone else with it either.

Really he was honoured that he was trusted with it.

Bren: He was putting the artistic side to our story

About what happened there really

And you know –

Rose: He was crafty though you know, Bren.

Every bloody rehearsal he was trying to get –

Bren: Sneak a word in.

Rose: Trying to miss a verse of Not Belfast City, the bloody...

Bren: Nice Girls.

It's got a verse about being like at home

And then getting involved in the strike,

Going to Wapping,

That was fine cos Wapping

It was right after the miner's strike

But when it come

'We were women in Belfast'

'Oh, we don't need this, we'll miss that verse out'

'No, Peter, we won't miss it out'

Cos its part of us, you know.

Rose: It's either all or nothing.

Sue and Charlie have completed their rehearsal. They move to sit UC in the 'notch' area looking through their scripts and having a drink from their bottles. They acknowledge Steve who has been standing at the top of the Vom watching the end of their rehearsal.

Steve enters.

Steve: So it was great,

It was like a whole – it was a family,

And actors used to stay there one, two years at a time,

They'd certainly stay for a season,

But most of them stayed for two or three,

So you really got to know each other

And you knew how each other worked,
 So it made rehearsals much much easier,
 Much, much friendlier,
 And of course because you knew each other,
 You could go and talk about a scene,
 Or another actor could suggest a different way of playing it,
 'Oh, could you just try it that way, to help me out with this line?' –
 Whereas in theatre you're always known for the actors bitching
 And actors getting at each other
 And there is an unwritten law in the theatre
 That actors never give notes to another actor,
 Because it can cause problems.
 It was only much later
 With the new theatre
 That things started to (pause)
 Slightly change
 And the actors that you got in then were actors,
 Career actors,
 Who weren't looking to stay there,
 But were there to do acts, and scenes.

Sue and Charlie have completed their rehearsal. They collect their
 things together and exit UC, Alice joins them.

Then it all started getting a bit choppy
 And you didn't have the same relationship
 As what you had at the old theatre,

Some of the actors that worked there
Had worked together for two or three years
And suddenly
You started feeling,
Hang on,
It's changing,
The whole thing's started to shift a little bit,
It's not as settled as it used to be.
And I think that was because of the new building.
A whole new theatre, a whole new atmosphere and (pause)
I don't know, the plays we did were the same,
The same thing,
But the company started to be slightly different
And suddenly we'd stopped
Being this working-class grand theatre
And suddenly became a regional repertory theatre.
And it suddenly felt slightly different –
I mean we tried to keep it the same but (pause)
Actors didn't stay as long
So you didn't have the chance to build up the relationship.
Some did, but there was like two counts of actors.
It was very,
Actors are very, very sensitive
And don't like to be criticised by anybody

Except the director

So it brought a different dimension in.

Steve looks around the stage and picks up a forgotten drink bottle and exits DL

6.6 Analysis of Narrative

The bringing together of Steve's narratives and those of Alice and Charlie, highlighted the transitional impacts of moving from old location to New Vic location; impacts which were felt within the theatre community as well as the 'local' community surrounding the theatre. The juxtaposition of the narratives of Steve, Alice, Charlie, Rose and Brenda created a number of resonances from which arose themes which extended and expanded this thesis: understandings of community are further developed in relation to location, intimacy and belonging with the documentaries and the theatre (through the person of Cheeseman) creating, for the participants, a sense of belonging both real and imagined. The theatre is seen as an intimate space through which connections can be made between audience members, performers and the events and people being re-presented on stage. This leads to representation which again becomes a major theme of these narratives, looked at from the perspective of both the performers, doing the representation, and the sources that are being represented.

6.6.1 Community and Belonging

For Steve it is his fascination with history which draws him to the documentaries and the Vic theatre. His narrative echoes those of Romy and Polly in Chapter Five, as he describes how he began to feel a part of the local community of Stoke through the documentaries. Alice and Charlie both feel that ‘Stoke was special’ but for them this was due to Cheeseman’s influence; ‘his passion was infectious’ and he created a working environment that showed respect for the performers by offering them exemplary facilities both back stage and front of house. The narratives show a sharp contrast between Steve’s growing attachment to, and love for, Stoke and the actresses’ dismissal of the local area. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the New Vic theatre was no longer on the street corner next door to the local shops and this feeling of belonging was brought out very strongly in the interviews with actors who worked at the ‘old’ Vic (and has been discussed as part of Chapter Five of this thesis). The theatre’s new location is physically close to Newcastle-under-Lyme’s town centre (within walking distance), although it is up a steep hill, and there were and are local shops in the immediate vicinity that Alice and Charlie seem to neglect, perceiving the theatre as separate from its local environment: for them it was ‘in the middle of nowhere’. It is possibly this perceived lack of social cohesion (interdependencies among neighbours) which gave the New Vic theatre a different ‘feel’ to the Vic, which was seen through Chapter Five as having a high level of social cohesion. Such high levels of social cohesion have been cited as important for the well-being of older adults in the community (Cramm, van Dijk and Nieboer 2012) and these studies may suggest that the move from Vic to New Vic created a possible loss of social benefits to the immediate older community surrounding the theatre.

Both actresses felt a part of the theatre community and enjoyed the building but felt no attachment to the location. For some reason, which they agree may be tied up with their work on *Nice Girls*, and is definitely tied to Cheeseman's passion for the area, they feel that their identities became linked to Stoke. The actresses' comments about the theatre being remote from anything also suggests that perhaps moving to the new location and creating such a wonderful environment has separated the performers from the theatre's immediate community and possibly separated the immediate community from the theatre, with the theatre becoming too 'grand' for many locals who may have felt more comfortable in the environment of the old theatre. Steve's comments, at the end of this scene, about the shifts in the micro-community of the Vic, which occurred when the theatre moved from 'old' Vic to New Vic, are also relevant here. The community, both internally and externally, has shifted 'and things started to slightly change'.

The life-course of the theatre involved the community of the Vic shifting from being a familial one with constant members who were free to criticise one another without taking deep offence, to one in which the members were no longer constant and the members of this community had to learn how to play their new parts within it. Charlie and Alice can be seen as examples of what Steve describes as the new community which moved into the Vic, that of 'career actors, who weren't looking to stay there', and yet these two career actors were still very much a 'fit' for the theatre and Cheeseman's views; they feel satisfied with their theatrical careers because of the quality of the work they have taken part in rather than any fame or fortune they might or might not have gained from it. The sensitivity problems that Steve

describes with the new breed of actors suggests that not all of these incomers were quite the same 'fit'.

6.6.2 The Vic as an Intimate Space

Alice and Charlie feel that *Nice Girls* brought a new audience to the theatre (new to them), one which was made up of working-class people who were connected to the mining community. Bennett (1997) points out that the relationship between the audience and the theatre is a reciprocal one in which the audience's involvement shapes the production. The audience becomes 'a self-conscious co-creator of performance'(21). By creating the documentaries for the local community (and one which may not otherwise have attended the theatre) and bringing that community into the theatre as an audience, Cheeseman and his company created an opportunity for the theatre and the community to forge links and make connections, affecting both performance and audience alike. The actresses believe that these people returned to the theatre, enjoying the opportunity to see the same actors and actresses in alternative productions, and they liken this to the experience of watching a soap opera, but Alice also makes intergenerational links, relating it back to the experiences of her mother and Charlie's parents when they worked in repertory theatre during the war. Cheeseman ran a theatre company where no-one was allowed to be 'a star' and egos were not tolerated, and yet his audience are described by these two actresses as returning to the theatre in order to see individual actors and actresses with whom they have become familiar. In a sense the theatre makes its own 'stars' though they do not receive any special treatment and can be playing a

lead part in one production but a bit part in the next. It is perhaps more relevant to consider these actors as becoming more recognisable members of the Vic community. The Ages and Stages interviews with older audience members highlights this sense of familiarity and intimacy which the theatre engendered; they found that participants 'value the sense of "being part of" or "close to" the action on stage and relate this to the possibilities offered by theatre-in-the-round' (Amigoni *et al.* forthcoming). They also found that this intimacy of staging symbolised a broader sense of togetherness and being part of the theatre. Steve continues this thread when talking about the experience of working in-the-round and how it enabled him to form a relationship with the audience that he could not form in a conventional proscenium arch theatre. Steve had found a bond between himself and his audience at the Vic which gave him an alternative 'star' status within the Vic audience community. It is possible that this status helped to create the immense pressure which Steve felt towards the end of his acting career at the New Vic and which ultimately led him to a near breakdown and finally to leaving the acting profession. This is discussed further within the final scene of *Nice Girls Round the Corner*.

6.6.3 Representation

Brenda and Rose's narrative drive focuses on what the women wanted from the documentary. Their goals were not the same as the theatres, and they were determined to tell their own story, and not have it twisted or re-written to suit someone else's agenda. They wish to have their 'truth' re-presented on stage. The juxtaposition of Steve's narratives and the women's highlights different forms of attachment to the Vic: Steve is seemingly happy to allow

his life-course to develop along with the Vic, whereas Brenda and Rose's life-courses have only come into contact with the Vic, as far as they are concerned, as a means to an end. Their language intimates that the whole experience was a trial of Cheeseman and the theatre; they suggest that they needed 'to be fair' to him as they appreciated his artistic abilities and the funding issues which he had to be aware of and which to some extent shaped how he could work.

Brenda and Rose's thoughts on representation offer an alternative view to that presented by the performers. They feel that they had to constantly battle to ensure that their story remained their own and didn't become 'a little story about bored housewives getting stuck into sommat' or, as Rose describes, it 'like the Song of Bloody Bernadette', full of 'this big strong woman coming along or a group of women and overcoming.' Their message was a political one and their aim was to keep the pits from closing; anything other than that had to be negotiated. She makes a clear statement about representation, saying, 'We weren't being awkward but there was no point them pretending they were doing our story when it wasn't our story'. For Rose the 'story' is not about their feelings as individuals but their needs as political activists. The story needed to be 'real' to her; she wanted to impart the political narrative, and her 'actuality' was based around this political narrative. Rose not only talks about her feelings at the time but also considers how she would deal with the situation now that she is older, saying 'had it been now, I think we'd have handled it totally differently'. She is aware that her youth led her to feel insecure in this new and alien community. Rose believes her life experiences and age have enabled her to feel less in awe of this community and to be able to stand on an equal plane with them.

The issue of representation is also looked at from the perspective of the actresses. They felt under a great deal of pressure to represent the women as they wanted to be seen and not only as they had spoken. The issue of appearance and reality seems relevant here as Alice describes a scene in the play where she did exactly as Bridget had described, but which she was aware was disliked intensely by Bridget. As she points out 'Now there's lots of different ways you can eat a bag of crisps and I did eat them in a particularly goading fashion.' Alice had re-created Bridget's story accurately but had translated it using her own interpretation of the 'character' and her own motivation for the actions. Clearly part of Alice's own motivation for this scene was to make the scene theatrically interesting and entertaining for an audience and in this case Alice's re-presentation of Bridget's story was upheld by Cheeseman and the company and the 'truth', as offered by Bridget, was not privileged. Bridget's view of her own 'identity' seems to be questioned here, as was discussed with regard to Brenda earlier in this chapter. Although the concept of identity is complex and many-sided I would agree with Ylanne (2012) that it is a sense of self, implying a subjective stance, which is socially and culturally constituted. Identity can be seen here as achieved through interaction and collaboration and for these women it has been achieved through membership of a group. Ylanne points out that this creation of identity through social categorisation implies 'exclusions and inclusions and intersections along and across group category boundaries' (2012: 3). The women have worked hard to achieve their 'identity'. They have been included in the group because of this identity and it is perhaps this which makes it difficult for them to accept the actress's representation if it does not match up entirely with their own view of self. Equally, Gina's 'identity' excluded her (in the women's eyes) from complete acceptance into the group.

6.6.4 Ethical implications

The question of ethics within the documentaries is a large one and one which I have discussed within the methodology section of this research. It is important to note a couple of points here: although researchers, such as myself, working in academic institutions currently have to go through a process of adjudication on ethical issues which is the remit of a committee, at the time of the documentaries, Cheeseman and the research committee negotiated, quite explicitly, with the participants they were researching, during the creative process; in addition, this documentary was perhaps the most 'ethical' in its approach to the participants, allowing them full access to the material and an ongoing ability to censor that material throughout the process. There is awareness from the women throughout the transcripts that parts of what they say should not be used within the documentary. In her role as honorary archivist for the Victoria theatre archive, Romy Cheeseman was concerned that I sought the women's permission to use the archived material relating to *Nice Girls* as she was very aware of how careful they had been during the documentary creation process. I did ask both Brenda and Rose if I could use the material and they were very easy-going about it. This time-lapsed ethical issue also raises different questions about ageing and memory, highlighting the importance of re-visiting this material. The twenty years between the recording of the interviews and now had made the material a lot less sensitive to the women. These narratives are now an important part of the women's life-course and the time lapse which has taken place allows these memories their full import within the narrative. The question of narrative truth or historical truth, 'fact' or theatrical representation is the major ethical issue which arose during the making of the documentary. The women wanted their stories to be told as factual events

which they had recorded in their diary and were now recounting to the company in rehearsal, but the actresses (and Cheeseman) wanted to add their own creativity and theatricality to the narratives. In this sense decisions were made about the production which blurred and possibly crossed the borders of aesthetics and ethics. An example of this can be seen in Alice's representation of Bridget as discussed above. Both Alice and Charlie say explicitly that their creative input was in the way in which they represented the women and yet this representation was driven by a desire to present something creative rather than to present the verbatim 'facts'. There is a tension between ethics and aesthetics here.

This final scene of *Nice Girls round the Corner: The End* was created in order to look at what the participants took away from their work at the Vic and on the documentary, and at how their life-courses were affected by this involvement. Researching the documentary dramas of the Victoria theatre, the *Ages and Stages* research team found that

It's also not just about the individual, but the way people relate to others. In one of our group interviews, there was a very interesting discussion about the ensemble approach within the theatre – being part of a company – and the effect this has had on people's approach to work throughout their lives. (Bernard and Rickett 2011)

These preliminary findings from the *Ages and Stages* research could be affected by the shift from 'old' Vic theatre to New Vic theatre and the shift in community that was experienced and discussed in the analysis above. It is clear that 'being a part of a company' and feeling part of the community of the New Vic theatre and to some extent of Stoke-on-Trent had an effect on the actors' life-courses. The 'company' to which the women activists belonged was not that of the theatre but rather of the Miners Wives' Action Group which for a brief period, during the

documentary, came into contact with and worked alongside the New Vic and its company. When interviewed, those involved in this play presented narratives relating to their approach to work throughout their lives, and this final scene of the play investigates how and if an involvement with the Vic and its company has affected the participants' life-course, ageing and approach to work. The women activists were clearly not as affected by their experience at the Vic as they were by their experiences of being involved as political activists and I have ensured that their voices, as voices of the community, are heard alongside those of the actors.

6.7 Nice Girls Round the Corner: The End

Steve bounces onto the stage from UC. He is full of energy, which slowly disappears during the speech

Steve: In the early days when I was younger,
 Acting, loved it, great, fantastic.
 I used to be an intuitive actor,
 So I could actually read the script,
 See a character,
 Work with the director,
 And it was like (clicks fingers).
 All I had to do was think about it,
 And what I would do is I would just automatically change
 Or Peter or Chris Martin or someone would say
 'I see the character like...'

And I'd think 'Feed it to me, feed it to me',
 And I'd be like a sponge,
 Take it in and go away and think about it
 And next day come back with a character.
 How they saw it and how I saw it and I'd put it all together.
 But then as I got older it became much more difficult.
 I think in the end
 I'd played that many parts
 That I'd burnt myself out really,
 And creativeness had gone out of it,
 That kind of taking things in,
 That had kind of disappeared
 Or had been worn down.

Steve moves slowly around the stage now until he reaches the
 steps DC. He sits on the steps

As I got older it would take me days, weeks,
 To get the lines in
 And then I would go on stage
 And I would be remembering lines,
 Not my character,
 Not what I was doing
 Not what the line meant or anything,
 I was remembering lines and I used to think,
 I can't do this anymore, I can't do it.

He stands and moves towards UC

Went up to Peter,
Sat in his office and I was just shaking,
'Can't do it, Pete, can't do it'.
So I started then to drop out of plays,
Have a rest in between,
Physically I could do it,
But mentally I was absolutely drained by the end of it.
I'd just burnt myself out at the end,
But I was so stuck with it,
I'd been there for so long the thought of leaving then was (pause)
Quite nightmarish really.

Steve moves to CS

I think really I was heading for a nervous breakdown,
But didn't realise it at the time.
It was only once I left it that I suddenly thought
Oh yeah, yeah, that's where I was,
I was on this slow journey to a nervous breakdown,
But you don't know it at the time
Because the discipline is so strong, that you just keep,
And you don't want to let anybody down,
It started to become a nightmare in the end.
And it was little things like that
That started to bother me really
At the new theatre,

Towards the end. (pause)

It's not the same, there's something not quite right.

And the only thing that I really enjoy is the documentaries,

I used to love all them

And I just had a natural thing for it,

But when I went back to doing normal plays,

I just found them so difficult.

Steve exits DR looking a little dazed as Charlie and Sue who are playing Rose and Bren enter UC

Rose: We went to see Nice Girls quite a lot of times

And we did have a lot of good feedback

From the audiences didn't we?

Bren: Yeah.

Rose: I think it was a powerful piece of work.

Bren: Yeah cos we did such a lot as it come over in the songs,

You know,

We went Greenham

And we met gays, lesbians that we met there.

You know everybody that we hadn't met before

And we realised that everybody's the same you know.

All fighting for the same.

Rose: That was in '84, though.

Bren: We'd already been down that road.

Bren: In the songs it put that across

Rose: To be honest, though,

It was just another project that we did,
Cos we've done lots and lots of projects
And it was a good project and thoroughly enjoyed it,
But it wasn't the most satisfying
Or best project I've ever done
Cos I think the singing and work we've done on CDs and,
I don't know,
It was just another project,
But I don't want to degenerate it because it was important
To get the history.
Bren: It's important, the history,
And like I say,
It was us that did it in Stoke obviously.
Rose: That sounds a bit big-headed,
But I don't mean to sound like that.
I think it was good
And it happened
And it's been recorded now for history.
Bren: But our main reason for doin' it,
Goin' down,
Was to highlight it
And keep the media attention on the pit closure.
Rose: Yeah, yeah.

The women look at each other and begin to sing a burst of 'We are Women, we are Strong' as if they are back performing at one of their charity gigs. As the verse ends...

Rose: I mean we used to do gigs to fund raise

For other people didn't we?

Like when we used to go to Manchester.

If anybody was like in struggle

We used to go and do a gig for them

Didn't we

And get us expenses.

Bren: We used to do the fire brigade union didn't we

And stuff like that, anyone in struggle.

Rose: They were dead good days,

But they've gone.

I mean you move on don't you.

Bren: The political climate's changed han't it,

To be fair.

And community.

It's all about individuals now.

It's bin the end of an era really isn't it.

Rose: That doesn't mean there's nothing left to fight for.

Rose and Bren: Oh no, no.

Bren: My God, no.

Rose: Just perhaps nothing much more to sing for.

Rose and Bren now exit UC and Alice enters from DR vom

Alice: The Tempest was the last play I ever did

As well as being Peter's last play.

I don't know what year that was.

That was the end.

I'd sort of said before, I think,

'I might give up this lark',

And then got offered that and really loved it,

And it was a really lovely way to finish,

Whatever year that was.

I haven't been on the stage since.

I've done bits of acting on telly,

I don't even have an agent anymore;

She died last year and I thought

I don't need to do any of that anymore.

I do fondly remember it but it's just,

You know,

That life of going to live in digs for almost no money.

It's quite fun when you're young but -

Charlie now enters as herself from UC

Charlie: Yes,

That side of it is great fun when you're young

But that side of it becomes less fun when you get older

And also you know women of a certain age

And a certain age being anything over about 34,

Nothing, nothing out there for you really.

Alice: Mmm.

Charlie: So you have to wait to play dowagers

And that's a hell of a long wait.

You have to be really committed.

Alice: I think Nice Girls was a great opportunity

For great parts for women.

I mean four of us having an absolute ball.

Charlie: Oh yes, it was great.

Alice: You know, doing that.

It was '93.

Charlie: I was 31.

Alice: I was 30. Gosh we were quite young.

Charlie: We were.

Alice: I mean thirty is nothing, is it?

Charlie: It's but a child now isn't it?

Alice: Golly, we were only 30.

Charlie: Yeah (pause)

Well, I'd worked a lot by then.

Alice: You had.

I knew exactly who you were.

I was very excited to be working with you

Because I'd seen you down at Derby.

I mean you were in with the in-crowd, you were.

Charlie: Um. Well yeah it took me,
No-one works constantly,
But on average I worked about 75% of the time
Which was quite good.

Alice: You were a busy girl.

Charlie: Um and then it all just all,
Just kind of stopped when I hit,
Well I was going to say when I hit 40
But it was a little bit before that actually,
It was more like 38,
And it then became really tricky to find.
I mean I still got some work,
The odd rep, telly and
But actually the sort of work that I had been doing
Didn't exist as much
Because rep was - I wasn't,
I mean for me
I wouldn't be able to do it now,
I'd be exhausted!
Can you imagine?

Alice: Yeah.

Charlie: I'd be exhausted.
When I was at Derby I'd rehearse one play during the day
And play another in the evening

And I'd be lead parts in both of those plays.

I literally wouldn't be able to do it.

I'd be on my knees if I tried to do one now, let alone two.

Alice: Yeah.

Charlie: I mean I was 25 or something.

I mean you could do it

But you couldn't do it for –

I mean I did it for a year practically

And I think if you were playing that level of part for a year

And all the stuff I was doing;

It was all big deep emotional stuff,

It wasn't kind of 'oops there goes my trousers' kind of stuff.

Alice: No, no.

Charlie: I might be able to do it, who knows.

I mean I do thirteen-hour days,

Round the corner at the Arts

So actually, I might.

Alice: Yes, exactly.

Charlie: Yes, a part of you thinks you couldn't do it anymore.

No – what happened really was

The parts just weren't happening,

The reps were closing.

The shows were always involving two people now

Instead of nine.

All those economic things.

And then what would happen,

You'd be waiting for the phone to ring

For them to give you the part of policemen number two.

Alice: In The Bill.

Charlie: In Casualty or The Bill.

And I kind of never really liked telly.

Am I just going to have to do this then?

And wait

And then suddenly my life just kind of changed

By doing a conversion degree at Arts

And then starting teaching there suddenly

And I wouldn't go back now.

Alice: I loved the theatre that I did

And I was really lucky

Because I did lots of great pieces of theatre,

The Tempest, and that sort of thing,

Lots of good plays and good parts for women,

But with an end to what?

I didn't know where that was going.

I didn't love it enough or have the ambition I think.

Didn't want it enough.

Charlie: Umm, I did love it enough,

But I didn't have the ambition enough.

Alice: Um. I loved rehearsing.

Charlie: Yes, so did I.

Alice: But I didn't love performing.

Charlie: That was my thing really.

I loved rehearsing,

I loved the process,

I loved the sense of community and the people,

Loved all that and then I'd do it once and

'Oh, do I have to do it again?'

Alice: Yes, and also the world of theatre,

Waiting for the phone to ring.

Charlie: That.

Alice: That I couldn't,

Really couldn't stand.

Charlie: I just thought.

I don't know when this was, don't know at all.

I did a fringe piece,

Um in some pub in London, as you do,

And there was a guy in it who was 66-67,

Some old –

You know

We're getting no money

And we're getting changed in a toilet and,

You know,

And there was this kind of desperateness about him –

Alice: Mm, mm.

Charlie: And I just thought, you know,

Shoot me

If you ever see me aged 67

Doing stuff for no money in a pub;

Kill me now.

Alice: Talking about your audition for Casualty.

Charlie: Exactly and hoping for that phone to ring.

Alice: Hoping desperately that you'll get it.

Charlie: And I just thought phhhh

And I'm so glad what turned up turned up

Because I would be doing the same.

I thought I do not want to be 98 or whatever,

Please God,

And just sitting there waiting for the phone to ring.

Or suddenly going

'Oh God, I could have done something else'

Because the phone never rang.

Alice: Exactly.

Charlie: It's like waiting all your life for a partner

Or waiting for the love of your life.

Eventually you say,

Well he might well come along

But what should I do in the meantime?

I'll carry on with my life.

Because it's that – I didn't want to regret,

Because what I'd done up to that point

I had so thoroughly loved and enjoyed

And felt proud of that

I didn't want to be pootling around going

'Oh, I've got one line on The Bill'.

Alice: I feel exactly the same.

Charlie: I went back down to Exeter,

Funnily, to see a mate do something

And you're sitting in the bar

With a coco or a cold cup of coffee

And I saw and you'd recognise him a mile off,

You know, an actor coming in,

They sort of go 'I'll buy a pint of lime and soda'.

Alice: For 35p.

Charlie: And then take that in through the pass door

Or the theatre door

And you see them doing it

And absolutely without any thought,

It was a complete gut reaction,

I just went 'Oh, thank God that's not me'

And that was the first time and I thought 'Oh wow'

And I wrote it down in a little notebook,
All I was thinking
And although I'd been unemployed for a while,
Been struggling for a few years,
That was the point when I went
'OK, I actually don't want to do that anymore'
I would much,
I wanted to be in the auditorium
But I thought I wanted to be a director.
I didn't want to perform anymore.
Because I think that also
As you get older the stress of performing,
The nerves of performing get worse.
Alice: Mmm.
Charlie: It somehow doesn't get easier. I felt.
Alice: Yeah, I don't know,
I found it got a bit easier,
But I think that was because I wasn't investing as much
Or I didn't care so much about my future
Or who might be out there watching
And pick me up from the show or whatever.
Charlie: I feel that everything I've done up to this point
Is what enables me to do what I'm doing now.
Alice: Yes.

Charlie: because if I hadn't been doing it for 25 years

How could I possibly,

Possibly tell others.

So I feel there's absolutely direct links,

In some ways I don't feel there's been a break for me at all

Apart from about five to six years

When I wasn't getting much work

And I didn't know what I wanted to do.

Those were horrible years.

Alice: But you've sort of found your niche now, you know –

Charlie: Absolutely.

Alice: You're flying now.

Charlie: But it's directly related.

It doesn't feel as if I've changed careers,

Except the actual performance.

Alice: I look back and I think

No, I did that

And I was lucky and I had a great time

And I'm very proud of the work I did, like you.

And then just morphed into,

Merged into doing what I do now

With the gradual change that the balance just shifted

That I won't act all the time

I'll do the continuity thing

And that was the little day job in-between the acting jobs

And it became the main thing,

But the day jobs were far more frequent

Than the acting jobs so...

Charlie: If I was to live in a pie in the sky world

And I could say I'd have Judi Dench's career

Then I probably would have been quite happy with it.

So it wasn't a lack of wanting it or anything.

Alice: Of course.

Charlie: It was just that, actually,

'That's not going to happen'.

Charlie and Alice exit DL as Sue (playing Bren) enters from UC she is again singing a snippet from one of the Nice Girls songs. Charlie who is now playing Rose joins in to complete the verse as she enters UC. They put their arms around each other's shoulders.

Rose: We had such support.

I think we didn't want to go back to what we were

Because they can say all they like

About the strike being a defeat,

We'll never say that

Because morally we were right

And we just got so much out of it.

It wasn't to do with money

It was about people joining together,

People helping each other worldwide.

Like Bren was saying,
 Meeting people from different communities,
 From the gay and lesbian community, the Sikhs, the Indians,
 You know like people you wouldn't
 Come into contact with in Biddulph,
 You wouldn't get many in Biddulph
 And you were out from your little,
 Your little glass box and you just,
 We just reached out to that many people
 Didn't we?

Bren: It changed us, completely really.
 That's why I'd never,
 Ever say we lost the strike
 Cos we gained so much out of it, you know.
 Well Nice Girls wouldn't have been
 If it hadn't have been for the strike would it?

The women exit UC and Steve appears on the platform UC.

Steve: So really by the end I was on my way out really,
 And I needed a long rest after that,
 But then you've got a mortgage and you're thinking,
 Ah, you can't turn round and say
 'No, I'm taking a year out'
 And you just think, arrrgghh.
 So you had all these pressures as well and by that time

As well it was getting to Peter's last few years at the Vic.
So in a way it all kind of came together at the end,
So when Peter left, I left,
But that's the nature of theatre anyway.

Steve moves from the UC platform and makes his way back down to the stage.

And then I moved into television.
But I paid for working for Peter for 21 years
Because I've got a house,
I've got a mortgage, I've got this, I've got that,
And then of course you couldn't
Suddenly afford to be out of work.
So when you were in work it was great,
And I did tours
And of course I've got a young family
And they'd just changed all the benefit system
So you couldn't go down and sign on.
And in the end I just said I've got to pack it in,
There's not enough money in it,
So really I'd paid for all those years
That I'd worked at the Vic
Cos all the ones who'd worked earlier at the Vic
Had moved out,
They are still in the profession, or most of them are,
Whereas mine came to an end.

I thought I've got to decide
Whether I wanted to be an actor or with the family
And I thought
No I want to be with my family
So I had to say goodbye to it.
I left in '98 so I would have been 49 or 50
Around that age (pause)
Yeah 49 to 50.
I'd come to the end really and I thought
No I've got to do something different.
Then I had two or three years of kind of struggling then
Because suddenly you were on,
You know it was like the army,
You were joining civvy street,
You thought 'Well what can I do?',
And you'd go down and say
'Right, I'll do any job that's going, any job that's going'.
'So what do you do?' – 'Oh, I'm a professional actor'
And they'd go
'Ah. Right. Have you ever thought of going into sales?' (laughs)
You know,
I said 'No, I'm not going to lie to people', you know,
'I don't want sales.'
I don't want to try and convince somebody to buy something;

I'm not going to use my talent for that'.
 And I tried driving a bus, I tried working in factories,
 I tried virtually everything really.
 But I was working at Newcastle College
 Doing a drama class on a Saturday morning and they said
 'Well what you'll have to do is take a teaching certificate'.
 So I said 'Oh, ok, fine'
 So I did that whilst I was there,
 And got my 7307
 Which allowed me to work in colleges and (pause)
 Then this job came up at the YMCA,
 They were asking for teachers, tutors, this that and the other,
 With a teaching certificate,
 So I went down there and got a job at the YMCA
 And I've been there ever since.
 And it's brilliant, very stressful, which is great.
 It's a side of life that I never knew existed when I was an actor.
 If I was working at the Vic now I'd do a documentary about it
 Because a lot of people just don't know it's there,
 All these young people
 Who've had their lives mucked up really from the beginning.

Steve moves to CS

The only thing I do now is the Penkhull Mysteries,
 Where there is a group of us in the village

And we do the Mystery plays each year.
I direct them and act in them so we just do one each year,
But it's kind of like getting bigger.
So that's the only thing that I am kind of involved in now,
In acting,
And in a way I don't miss it now – I feel as though I've done it.
And as I said before I tried television and hated it
Oh, the Vic was very rewarding,
But this is just as rewarding now,
And now that I'm older I don't want to do it all the time.
I mean I had 21 years of playing everything,
Absolutely everything,
You know from playing twenty-first soldier in the line,
To Hamlet
And everything in between,
But the documentaries were always the thing,
From when I was eighteen,
So really that visit has influenced my life all the way through,
And then settling in Stoke,
And then working here
And working with a section of the community
That is very hard to reach,
So it's quite a long journey really. (pause)

Steve moves from CS through the auditorium and back to the platform above UC as he speaks. He sits with his legs dangling over the edge

You just think,

'Ah, don't want to do this',

Even if there was the odd bit of theatre coming up

Now and then,

I thought 'Ah, I just don't want to do it,

Got past it now'.

But no, the Vic was (pause),

It's kind of made me into a Stokey now,

My eldest daughter supports Stoke City and it's great.

The lights fade out on the stage and finally on Steve.

6.8 Analysis of Narrative

The creation of the above scene highlighted the perceived benefits which being involved in the *Nice Girls* documentary has had on the life-courses of the participants and brought the following themes into focus: The impact of ageing (perceived or 'real') on an acting career. This theme was strongly connected to gendered transitions in middle age required to create a positive sense of self in older age and the linking of creativity and ageing, enabling the participants to retain an involvement with creative activities without the hard slog and emotional drain of repertory theatre work.

Steve, Alice and Charlie's narratives involve a realisation that they could no longer be a part of the acting world that had thus far dominated their working lives. It is important to note that 'older age' for these participants means late 40s for Steve and late 30s for the actresses. For Alice and Charlie, as women within the theatre, the 'good' roles became harder to find around their mid to late 30s, and they struggled to find work, with a choice of either surviving until the older women's character parts become feasible or moving out of theatre for a new career; both chose ultimately to take the second option with Charlie becoming a lecturer at a drama college in London and Alice working for BBC radio as a continuity announcer and presenter. Steve's narrative tells a story of decline into 'older age'; he has exhausted himself and realises now that he was near to a breakdown before he left the Vic, but had continued to push himself because his chosen profession was one of discipline and because of his familial ties to the theatre, meaning that he didn't 'want to let anybody down'. The challenges which he enjoyed when he began his career had now become 'much more difficult'. He feels that his 'creativity' has gone and he can no longer take things in and enjoy the challenge of adapting to new roles. He describes himself as a 'sponge' soaking up others' creativity and ringing out his own creative juices, mixed with theirs, for each and every audience. Steve recognises his own loss of creativity; no longer being able to learn and recall his lines as easily as he did in the past; recognising that this part of his acting 'job' was taking over from the creative process he enjoyed; he is exhausted but 'the thought of leaving then was (*pause*) quite nightmarish really'. Although Steve was 'burnt out' he could not imagine life outside of this community. It was still his 'family', and his life story was written there. It was a major part of his identity and very hard to leave.

Rose and Brenda's narratives are not tied into the themes connected with ageing and an acting career, but they do relate to transitions into older age and are relevant to this thesis as the women link their transitions, in part, to their involvement with the *Nice Girls* documentary. That being said, the women make it clear that their narratives began to shift long before any involvement with the New Vic and the *Nice Girls* documentary. Their identities were altered because of their exposure to alternative cultures, races and lifestyles that they had encountered during the fights to keep the pits from closing from 1984 onwards. For these women the *Nice Girls* documentary and their involvement with the Vic was another stage in their personal and political life-courses but it was also one that allowed others to view their role as important. It allowed them to be recognised by their own community and also enabled this part of their life-narratives to be written down for future reference, and 'recorded now for history'. During the pre-production interviews with the women they were asked by Cheeseman to narrate their family history as well as their experiences relating to the occupation of the pit, and these interviews were transcribed and are stored in the archive. (I have discussed these biographical interviews as part of the final source analysis below.) In this way, the women's life stories have been recorded for history in more depth and detail than the final production allowed. Again the final documentary becomes one iteration of a community's memories with the archive offering many more iterations.

Brenda and Rose feel that their life-narratives and life-courses altered again due to the political climate. The communities they sang for and supported became disjointed and dispersed, shattered by the Tories' policies. I asked them if this meant they felt that they had nothing left to fight for and they answered strongly that it did not, but that they now had found

different ways of supporting those who were 'in struggle'. In some ways Brenda and Rose, like Alice, Charlie and Steve, have been forced to alter and adapt their lives and the stories that they tell about them because of situations outside of their control, yet they hold onto the learning which they have gained from their past experiences and use this to guide and shape their current and future life-course; Brenda points out that 'It changed us, completely really. That's why I'd never, ever say we lost the strike cos we gained so much out of it, you know'. The women have gained a broader world-view through their experiences as activists.

In a similar way to Steve, Alice and Charlie found that their identities were bound up with theatre and acting and their narratives describe the way they had to negotiate their own shifts of identity and rewriting of their life narratives. For Alice 'not wanting it enough' led her to leave the stage, while for Charlie it seems to be a strong sense of realism that drove her to give up acting. Charlie links her desire to leave the acting profession with an experience she had as a younger actress working with an older male actor who cannot give up his dream of acting. She describes this 66- or 67-year-old man as a sad figure, to be pitied, saying, 'Shoot me if you ever see me aged 67 doing stuff for no money in a pub; kill me now'. For Charlie it is the waste of life that upsets her most. She can visualise herself as an older person saying "'oh god I could have done something else", because the phone never rang.' This desire to make the most of life, was again highlighted by Alice (within her interview but not included in the play) when she talked of her niece who is in her 30s and also an actress and struggling to get work. She says: 'I want to just say "go and do something else, you're a bright girl, you're well-educated. Don't waste any more time at this"'. For Alice the idea of being educated seems to be important; it seems to open potential doors to actresses that will allow them to escape from a work

narrative, which is likely to lead to a sense of failure, especially in middle and older age. The potential for education to open new doors is supported by Steve's narrative and for Charlie it is indeed education which enabled her to re-write her life narrative: having gone back to study in her 40s she was then employed by the college at which she studied and is now happily working as head of musical theatre, combining her 25 years of theatrical experience with her recently gained academic qualifications.

There are also gendered aspects of these narratives. For Steve work has a centrality in his life, he is the bread winner and must support his family, for both Alice and Charlie work is central but does not seem to hold the same importance. Bernard *et al* (2000: 31) point out that 'women's lives fit least readily into models that compartmentalise life stages. Instead it is more useful to think in terms of interwoven life-course strands, employment being but one of these.' Conventional wisdom would have it that women are more flexible; willing to take on a variety of roles and responsibilities; pick up and put down work; multi-task and such, which might help explain the seeming difference between the women's reactions and responses to their situations versus Steve's.

It has been a hard shift away from the work narrative that both Alice and Charlie have worked so hard to achieve yet their sense of self-respect and realism seems to have enabled them to make that transition. For Charlie the realisation that she was ready to make this shift came quite dramatically when she saw an actor going through the pass-door at a theatre with his pint of lime cordial and realised that she was glad that she was not doing the same thing; Alice's shift from one life narrative to her current one was a more gradual process than

Charlie's and she describes it as a 'morphing' from one thing to another. It is interesting to consider Charlie and Alice's experiences of ageing and shifting careers and how positive they have felt about taking their experiences into their future roles. Moody (2005: 67) points out that 'successful ageing' as it is currently regarded often implies an attempt to retain youthfulness which deprives us of the insights gained by those who 'have gone through the decent and returned with a message of hope'. It is possibly partly due to this desire to achieve what is perceived as 'successful ageing' that all three actors have felt the need to move out of acting and find an alternative way of ageing in an alternative career, taking on a new challenge and succeeding in a new area.

Whilst I have described Steve's narrative as one of decline, it is only a decline within the acting career that he chose as his initial working life-course. Gullette (2004: 11) argues that the decline metaphor, which permeates western culture, is an insidious disease 'as hard to contain as dye', which fastens on to us as we become members of society. Steve struggled to re-negotiate his own life/career-course and fight off this decline narrative, likening his exit from theatre to 'joining civvie street'. The world outside of the Vic seems inhospitable and alien to him. For Steve it is a loss of acting within the Vic theatre, a loss of a community and a family that he has been a part of for 21 years. Steve feels forced to choose his real family commitments over his adopted family of the Vic; his priorities have shifted as his life-course has progressed. He feels punished for his commitment to the Vic, having been totally committed to one theatre and having spent so much energy doing this that he has little left to give; he knows no other line of work and finds that he is disillusioned with other acting work, either in theatre or television, as it does not offer him the respect and community which he has grown to expect

in his working environment. For a time he is lost in his new world but he is forced to find a new life/work-course as he has a home and a family dependent upon him earning a living. Steve eventually finds a new career which he can identify with, working with young people at a YMCA, encouraging those who have often had a bad start to their lives to achieve their potential. He recognises that his desire to work with these young people and his ability to do his job well stems from his experiences at the Vic.

Steve, Alice and Charlie all seem content with their new life/work-courses and have demanding and, as Steve describes his job, 'stressful' working environments, and yet they all express their doubt at their ability to work in an acting career now that they are older. There is a belief that they could no longer take the pressure of the work they once did – though Charlie and Alice also challenge this view once they've articulated it – that had they carried on they would have burnt themselves out much as Steve feels he did. It would appear to be not only the long working hours but the effort of having to create and work on acting parts that were 'massively big, emotional parts', which Charlie claims she could no longer achieve on a long term basis. She too feels she would have 'burnt out' had she carried on working at the emotional and physical level she worked at when younger. Alice feels that acting is 'a young person's game'. Like Steve she now has commitments that she didn't have when she was 30 and performing in *Nice Girls*. Her priorities in life have altered and she now has a mortgage, a pet and life-partner who she doesn't want to be away from for months on end. Though she acknowledged in her interview that her life in theatre was 'a great life', she went on to describe it as 'not eternal life unless you are extremely successful'.

For Alice, Charlie and Steve the 'extreme success' in their acting careers did not arrive, nor was it something that they were searching for. They chose acting work which was fulfilling and which they can look back on with pride; however, their narratives also suggest that had they somehow found 'success' they would not have needed or wanted to re-write their life narratives or make the transition they made. However, as Andrews (2009) points out 'there is no consensus on what constitutes positive (or successful) aging, nor even what tools should be used to construct such a model' (1). Had the performers achieved 'success' and economic capital within their chosen acting careers there would have been no need to move out of acting as they would then have had the financial freedom to build a life alongside their acting and this social and economic capital might have enabled them to consider their ageing as a performer as positive, rather than the very negative image of ageing as a performer which Charlie creates whilst telling the story of working with the older actor. Andrews (2009: 4) argues that 'The language of success and failure, of measurable outcomes, seems to bypass the very quality which lies at the heart of aging well – a sense that the journey is worthwhile, and that the challenges with which one has been faced have been met while keeping one's dignity intact.' For these performers ageing is measured in terms of success and failure whilst they are part of the theatre world but by choosing to move out of acting they have found a way of searching for and ultimately achieving a positive and 'successful' work-based ageing process, whilst keeping their 'dignity in-tact'.

Steve ends the play talking about acting and saying 'I just don't want to do it, got past it now' and yet his creative drive is still very much in existence. Like Charlie and Alice, Steve's withdrawal from a professional acting life is also a reconstruction of this life. For Charlie that re-

construction came in the form of teaching acting, for Alice it came in the form of radio presentation and Steve works with the local community to create a yearly mystery play. It is also interesting that though Steve is clear that he no longer wants to act professionally he agreed to be a part of the company for the Ages and Stages production and he took an acting part in the celebration of Cheeseman's life held at the New Vic in July 2010. For Alice and Charlie, although their life-courses have moved away from acting and from the Vic they are still drawn to the profession and they also find they identify themselves to some extent with Stoke. Steve is drawn to the profession and very much drawn to the Vic and to Stoke; he has become a 'Stokey'. Whilst the actors involved in *Nice Girls* have become to some extent part of the community of Stoke, the women activists have always considered themselves part of this community but believe that their experiences have enabled them to move outside of this community and develop as human beings by doing so.

6.8.1 Conclusion

My play has explored the experiences of the actors and activists looking at their engagement with the community of Stoke and of the Vic theatre (through the documentary). It has taken a life-course perspective, which as Jamieson and Victor (1997: 181) point out is 'best viewed as a map of orientation, suggesting important points to look out for on the road to an understanding of ageing'. My aim has been to offer the audience a better understanding of ageing by presenting such 'important points' and transitions.

The narratives told in the contemporary interviews and included here in my play were familiar to those I was finding in the archive, but with a sense of time lapse. The archive enabled me to focus on the women activists who have aged in the contemporary interviews and although their political narrative drive was still very much at the forefront, it had shifted and calmed with time. The textual source analyses which follow place this past world, newly discovered, alongside the narratives of here and now – of the participants and performers as they recalled their experiences and re-told their stories, as can be seen in *Nice Girls Round the Corner*. This added a further layer to the buried narratives of the archive, in some instances clarifying and agreeing and at others disagreeing and confusing the evidence. As Bernard *et al.* (2000) suggest, this way of working fits with a contemporary socialist feminist way of exploring women and ageing by looking at multiple layers of oppression that women are subject to. In this way I am seeing ‘no single or universal category of “woman”’ (11) but rather trying to understand the experiences of these working-class women. The next section of this thesis presents two textual source analyses of sections from the original documentary and continues to offer a life-course view of the women activists by exploring the biographical interviews which Cheeseman carried out.

6.9 Nice Girls Source Analyses

The analysis of scenes from *Nice Girls* takes on a different shape to that of the analyses for *Fight for Shelton Bar!* as the source material for *Nice Girls* came predominantly from the interviews with the four women, which in turn was shaped by the diary which was kept by the

women during the occupation. The women were invited to attend all of the early rehearsals, only being asked to stop attending once the script had reached a final version (at the request of the actresses, who felt they needed time to rehearse the script without further alterations or additions being made). The women's presence at rehearsals enabled the source material to be clarified and thickened within the rehearsal room but because of the clear narrative chain of events presented in linear form through the diary, Cheeseman had the shape of the documentary from a much earlier point than he did with *Fight for Shelton Bar!* The second half of the documentary, once the women had got inside the pit, was structured around this diary. Whilst the women activists are inside the pit Rose remains outside the pit at the pit camp (a makeshift headquarters from which all activities are monitored and which deals with the press and the raising of the profile of the activities).

The first half of the documentary was put together from the early interviews Cheeseman carried out with the women asking them to specifically tell him about 'planning the occupation' (MUSH 1993 6: 1). The women tell stories about the events leading up to the occupation of the pit and these stories were cut and pasted from the transcripts to become the narratives which Cheeseman used as the basis for the first half of the *Nice Girls* script.

Although the structure of the documentary was set quite early in the process, in their interview, Alice and Charlie describe the ever-changing nature of the script during rehearsal. Prior to rehearsals starting the actresses were offered the original tapes from which the transcriptions were taken, yet they clearly did not see themselves as 'researchers' on this project, and Charlie talks of using the tapes as an opportunity to get the Potteries accent right

and to find out about the ‘character’ she was about to play. There is little evidence of alteration between original transcriptions and finished play, but it is clear that Cheeseman would have shifted scenes around and added bits of dialogue – which were offered by the women in rehearsal rather than on the original transcriptions – which would have made the learning of lines and the sequence of the action quite problematic for the actors. This contrasts with *Fight for Shelton Bar!* where the script was pieced together from a large number of sources and re-shaped throughout the process.

<i>Archival material used for source analysis:</i>
<i>Nice Girls Tape Transcripts 1993 MUSH 6 ‘Planning’ recorded 26th July 1993</i>
<i>Present: Bridget Bell, Rose Hunter, Brenda Proctor, Peter Cheeseman</i>
<i>Nice Girls Tape Transcripts 1993 MUSH 1 ‘Occupation’ recorded 3rd June 1993</i>
<i>Present : Bridget Bell, Gina Earl, Brenda Proctor, Peter Cheeseman</i>
<i>Prompt copy</i>

Figure 6.1 Archived material for Wilkinson scene

6.9.1 The Wilkinson Scene

The Wilkinson scene (see appendix 6.2) comes fairly early in the play as part of the women’s planning of the occupation. The women have decided where they will head for when they enter the pit and have made a list of everything which they believe they may need during their occupation: they have decided on when they will go in and how long they will stay and have carefully prepared for this time. The scene is set as if in a Wilkinson store, with two metal rails, centre stage, representing the shelving of the shop, and the two women move around these shelves during the scene. Rose’s daughter is imagined during the scene, and the male parts are taken by Steve Granville.

Rose and Brenda are on a top secret shopping expedition. Nonetheless, Rose thinks nothing of taking her daughter with her; the little girl has been a part of her activities since a baby and is accepted as an inevitable appendage to the trip. This is the only scene within the documentary at which a child is present (and even here she is only imagined). The intergenerational relationships between mothers and children were talked about by both Rose and Brenda and the importance of these relationships is discussed within the following analysis. The inclusion of Rose's daughter here, however, seems to be for humour value rather than to highlight the intergenerational impact of both the actions of the women and of the closures of the pits.

The women are aware that shopping for such items as rope and toiletries is accepted as "housewife stuff" but that many of the tools they require for their occupation of the pit will look a little out of the ordinary. The women recognise that their expected 'role' is viewed by the men and by anyone who might watch them in the shop as a typically 'female' one – the role of housewife and mother. Buying tools is an unusual task for them to carry out, and one with which they are not comfortable. They state, '[W]e were just shifty, looking round, you know, thinking what's everybody thinkin!' (Prompt script 1993). Whilst the women see themselves as telling alternative or counter-narratives (Andrews 2001), particularly in relation to their politics and to their roles as activists, they still accept dominant narratives of what it is to be a 'woman', especially in relation to the home. They fit with Tore *et al.*'s comment that 'critical stories are always (and at once) in tension with dominant stories, neither fully oppositional nor untouched' (2001: 151). The women appear to accept some aspects of 'dominant stories' of female behaviour whilst at the same time challenging them with their activism.

The scene allows the audience to experience the tension that the women are feeling but as in the entire production this tension is relieved by humour, which seems to be the life-line for Rose and Brenda throughout their activities. As activists they take their political roles very seriously and this could have put off an audience; however, Cheeseman cleverly uses the women's humour and his own artistic interpretation of their humour to balance this out and to enable the women to come across as 'real' people rather than political ciphers. The scene ends with Rose's daughter taking a rope from the store without paying (mistakenly) and the women rushing away from the scene. It is interesting that Cheeseman chose to include this accidental act of criminality, foreshadowing the real one that the women are about to commit. It could also be seen as a reference to the criminal activities which most of the women talk about during their biographical interviews, which are discussed within *The End: Transcriptions*. Again, the scene shows the women's state of mind: they are totally involved in the operation and their actions are ones of panic; they are being shown as fallible human beings with whom the average man/woman and audience member can identify.

6.9.2 The Transcripts

Whilst the Wilkinson scene in the finished documentary is fairly short, I have chosen to explore the original transcribed interviews which cover this specific event and also to look at the entire 'planning' section of transcriptions in order to explore the thematic threads which are present in the archive but to a large extent missing or implicit within the final documentary. The archived 'planning' section contains a number of thematic threads discussed below; the

importance of the political focus of the documentary, stereotyped roles, intergenerational relationships and tensions, family, further understandings of community and the mediating role of memory.

It is from this part of the archived transcriptions that the song *When You Goin' to do Somethin' Hinnie* was created by Dave Rogers. Rose, Brenda and Bridget had all worked with Rogers previously, having set up a singing group for which Rogers wrote many of the 'actuality' based songs. In the programme notes to *Nice Girls* Cheeseman talks of Rogers as being inspired by Charles Parker, 'the brilliant radio producer' (Cheeseman 1993: 11), who was a co-founder of Banner Theatre company as well as a mentor to Cheeseman in his documentary work. This highlights the familiarity which the activist women have with the documentary 'tradition'. They are familiar with the kind of work that documentary involved and not naive in the way that some of the Shelton Bar interviewees are. Rogers's work contrasts strongly with Rose and Brenda's perception of the musical style which they felt Cheeseman wanted to bring to the documentary – they describe this as 'folky' and 'sea shantie'. It was perhaps not so much the musical style which the women were fighting against with Cheeseman but more the content of the 'actuality'. Cheeseman required this actuality to be focused on the women's own experiences whereas the women wanted the actuality to include and be driven by their political message. Whilst Rogers was also working with actuality, his own agenda was equally as (party) political as the women's and therefore they were able to work together to weave political comment throughout their narratives and for this to form the basis of their songs.

The women go on to discuss why they had to ensure that their pit occupation was so media savvy. They describe previous occupations carried out by women at Kiverton and Parkside pits, which went unnoticed by the media, and they were determined to make their point to the nation; Brenda states that they needed to 'make sure it 'ighlighted and everybody knows about it' (MUSH Transcripts 1993 6: 1). The women's message from the start was not a quiet private message: they were keen to tell the world of the injustices they felt the miners and their families were suffering at the hands of the Tories. This is the 'actuality' as far as they were concerned and it is an actuality which Cheeseman allows through in his documentary (according to the women's narratives he had no choice in this as they threatened to occupy the theatre if they didn't get what they required); however, as previously discussed, Cheeseman does not want or allow the party-political message to be the main focus of the work.

Rose, Brenda and Bridget perceive the attitudes of the miners towards them and towards what these men consider to be a 'woman's role' as shifting; Brenda describes her own husband saying: 'My husband would never bring washing in till it was dark in case anybody saw him. Never hoover up in case anybody came, saw him through the winder' (MUSH Transcripts 6: 1). The women manage to alter the men's attitudes to their involvement and Rose states: 'I think the lads respected us after that knew we were equal to them and could do the same as much as them if not more' (MUSH Transcripts 6: 2). The occupation was a carefully negotiated interaction with the men and with the NUM, but one which the women demanded to be in control of. It was an opportunity for the women to show their independence and their strength. It is perhaps this part of the 'actuality' which Cheeseman picked up on and ran with in *Nice Girls*. It is also this aspect of the women's actuality and way of perceiving themselves which

makes them struggle with Gina's family orientated, less political involvement in the occupation, and which also made Brenda unhappy with the portrayal of her in the production. Rose commented in her interview with me about her annoyance at her mother-in-law's lack of involvement in the fight to keep the pits open. There is an intergenerational aspect to this conflict. Romero and Stewart (1999) comment that 'How we become mothers and "do" mothering is culturally prescribed, although motherhood and mothering are written as "natural phenomenon"; anything "different" is "unnatural"' (xvi-xvii). An intergenerational shift appears to have taken place between Rose's mother-in-law's expectations of the role of a mother and Rose's own expectations. Rose sees her own role as mother to be one of educating and involving her children in her politics and political activities, and yet her own mother-in-law has maintained a distance from any involvement. She has seen her role as separate from political activity. Unlike Rose, she has accepted and re-enacted the dominant narratives of female behaviour and motherhood. The women admit that they are in a small minority of 'activists' and yet it is their driving passion to activate not only their community but the world that drives their occupation of the pit and their narratives.

Whilst a political narrative is the women's main focus, it is clear that family is also of major importance to them. They are fighting for their families and they also recognise that their families' needs must come first. Whilst wanting to be acknowledged as equals to their men-folk they accept that they are still the ones who have to take responsibility for the children and it is for this reason that Rose immediately states that she will be unable to take part in the occupation: 'Bren: And Rose said realistically I can't go in and do it, because of me kids. Because of family commitment' (MUSH Transcripts 6: 3). Brenda refers to Rose's use of the word

'realistically' linking with the idea of 'actuality' and the 'real' narratives of the women which direct and shape the events of the occupation. Rose's husband is very involved in the strike and she has two small children to care for. This is one activity where she can not take her children along and there appears to be no alternative, to her, other than to remain outside of the pit during the occupation and co-ordinate the occupation and the media from the pit caravan. For Rose the dominant narratives of motherhood are too strong to be overcome in this situation. She is fighting against them but has to acknowledge a need to live within them.

Family is again brought up as a primary concern during the documentary when Gina's husband comes to the caravan to ask for help with the washing and Rose immediately thinks that he will want to pull Gina out of the occupation and is willing to do this for the sake of family, giving 'priority to the family' (Prompt Copy, Final Scene: 1). Within the finished documentary 'family' is only discussed in relation to the women, their husbands and children and does not engage other intergenerational relationships. However this ageing and intergenerational aspect is engaged with within the biographical interviews which Cheeseman carried out with the women and does therefore remain recorded in the archive though omitted from the documentary, presumably to allow the narrative thrust of the documentary to remain focused on the four women taking part and the events and planning of the occupation. My own investigation of the archival material draws out the implications of the intergenerational stories both here and in the following source analysis.

Family and intergenerational relationships become part of Rose's narrative about the Wilkinson shopping episode, with the presence of her daughter. Rose and Brenda discussed in

their interview with me the role of their children in their political activities and state that they came along and that the entire pit camp involved children. For the wives to be involved the children had to also be included and thus the activities became intergenerational and the younger children grew up within this environment. A comparison can be drawn here with political activities and happenings such as Greenham Common, in terms of female activism and the involvement of entire families and different generations. Rose states that her daughter has been with them (the women activists) since she was six weeks old, highlighting the importance of intergenerational involvement and also the importance, for Rose, of her role as an activist, and her need to return to this role, taking her six-week-old baby with her. Whilst Rose acknowledges that family comes first, she also accepts that family must fit into her life and her political activities; for Rose, her children simply came along. Rose's narrative also links to beliefs expressed by the feminist Zelda Curtis who fought for women's rights, especially for older women, becoming known as 'Zelda the elder'. The *Guardian* obituary for Curtis (Jempson 2012) states that 'she believed that a woman's place is on the picket line as much as at home, and she brought up her daughters, Sue and Joan, accordingly.'

Whilst family is one reason to fight to keep the pits open, Rose, Bridget and Brenda feel that they took part in the occupation for a larger political purpose; Gina's purpose, in contrast, was not as broad, she feels the need to take part in the occupation to support her own family and does not really look beyond this context. For both Brenda and Rose Gina's purpose is valid but is not enough for the women who are doing it for family *and* the bigger picture. Feminism was not mentioned in the narratives of Rose and Brenda and yet their desire to be 'equal' to their husbands and to take on their activism, links to the liberal feminist movement of the time.

Bernard, Chambers and Granville (2000) suggest that the goal of this movement was 'to achieve equal rights with men, not by changing the structure of society but by reform and legislation to improve women's position' (10). Rose and Brenda's political aims are not directly feminist but their actions and narratives link them closely to these goals. There would appear to be little support for age in this liberal feminist narrative. This wave of feminism in the 1990s also effectively excluded older women – there was a 'blaming the mothers' feel at the time and, it has to be said, ageist attitudes too. Bernard *et al*, point out that 'the concerns of mid-life and older women were notable by their absence during much of first- and second-wave feminism' (2000: 10). This relates both back to Rose's antagonism towards her mother-in-law and her lack of involvement in the strike and forward to the comments made by Gina and Rose about their parents in the final section of this chapter.

Gina was the last choice for the women: they felt that her smoking could cause problems during an occupation and they weren't sure she could be trusted not to tell someone what was planned; however, as the other women were discounted due to their commitments, or refused to take part, they were forced to fall back on Gina. Gina's alternative aims for her activism complicate understandings of the archival material and the finished documentary by offering alternative narratives of family and intergenerational relationships to those of the other activist women. It is not surprising, then, that there was some resentment from Rose and Brenda (as seen within their interview with me) that Gina's role was made so central within the documentary. Rose, Brenda and Bridget had gone through months of careful planning to prepare for this occupation and they were acting on behalf of their local community and on behalf of the mining community nationally; in contrast, Gina had come into the project at the

last minute with no real political aims. Yet, her role within the second half of the documentary is a lead one: she is seen as the motivating force who finds the women an alternative place to occupy and she comes across as a strong-minded and forthright individual.

This source analysis continues to offer material relating to understandings of community began in Chapter Five, acknowledging the differences in these understandings between the two documentaries. The archived material highlights tensions recognised by the women between communities of identity (mining), familial community and communities of location (Stoke). The women consider what understandings of community the media and wider national 'community' may respond positively to. They recognise that the fourth woman chosen for the sit-in (the role eventually taken by Gina) needs to be from the local area and needs to be a miner's wife. They consider bringing in someone from outside of the Potteries but are concerned that the press may pick up on this and make a mockery of the event. They perceive the media's view of 'community' as linking work, family and place and so choose a co-activist who fits all of these criteria. Brenda states: 'They're goin say "they're not really miner's wives oos 'usbands work at the pit. They're just a bunch of loony women oo've taken over"' (MUSH Transcripts 6: 16). To be accepted as legitimate protesters by the media the women feel that they have to be seen as fighting for their own community, as central members of that community. The idea of a spokesperson having to represent a community from inside that community implies that a 'community' is, in a sense, a 'closed shop': those who exist outside of that community, in this case identified with a location, cannot be representative of that community. Whilst the women do not see their community as a 'closed shop' (they are happy to consider including someone from outside of their own region), they are aware that the

media and the general public may do so. In a way it is ironic that the women are presuming that they will get a more positive response from the media if they focus on local issues rather than the bigger political issues, which is what Cheeseman is also trying to do with his documentary and what the women are constantly fighting to extend.

Much of the original transcript for this 'planning section' of the occupation is taken up with the women, prompted by Cheeseman, trying to remember exact details, locations, times, event order and people involved in the planning process. Bridget, Gina and Brenda speak over each other, finishing each other's sentences and helping to prompt each other's memories. When I carried out my own interview with Rose and Brenda nearly twenty years later the two women worked together to remember the situation and to make a mutual and agreed sense of the narratives in a very similar way to that which they engaged in twenty years earlier. The effort which the women put into ensuring that they had the details correct also enabled Cheeseman to accurately re-create the events. As discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, group interviews enabled the women to co-construct their narratives in ways that they may not have been able to recall if interviewed alone. This group interview process, as pointed out by Smith (2010) 'confers identity and affirms confidence, with the interesting twist that remembering in groups might be inefficient and hamper individual recall' (44). For Cheeseman, the fact that the women are interviewed as a group was a positive one and he does not seem to have acknowledged the potential for inefficient individual recall. It may well have allowed him to feel that he was receiving a broader narrative, a more reliable 'actuality' as seen from a number of perspectives. It is important to recognise that these three women are all driven by the same political forces and thus their perceptions of events may be oriented in the same

direction as each other: their narratives, grouped together are aimed at making a political statement or a kind of political pudding (a variant of Cheeseman's determination not to create 'Cheeseman pudding'). Cheeseman may have seen his job as ensuring that this political pudding was mixed up with a large investment of the personal, humour and factual description of events. Cheeseman is creating a framework in which sympathy and empathy are generated by the narratives of the women.

The final speeches of Gina, Brenda and Bridget, which come at the end of the documentary are a concession (along with the songs), which Cheeseman made to the political narrative of the activists and are the section of *Nice Girls* from which the final textual source analysis is based. The source analysis explores the biographical narratives of all four activist women; discovering what led to these women becoming the people we see depicted in the final speeches. I am acknowledging and exploring the possibility that 'as people age, they continue to develop and come to know themselves better' (Bernard, Chambers and Granville 2000: 13). It draws out the themes of intergenerational relationships, family and community which are also central within the final speeches.

6.9.3 Final Speeches

<i>Archival material used for source analysis:</i>
<i>Nice Girls Tape Transcripts 1993 MUSH 8 'lives and Beliefs' recorded 18th August 1993</i>
<i>Present : Bridget Bell, Gina Earl, Rose Hunter, Brenda Proctor, Peter Cheeseman</i>
<i>Prompt copy</i>

Figure 6.2 Archived material for final speeches

Rose and Brenda both felt that the speeches which they created with Cheeseman for the end of the documentary were crucial aspects of that documentary. For them these speeches gave them an opportunity to say in their own words exactly why they carried out the occupation and it was an opportunity to make a clear political statement. The following are the speeches as presented on stage by the actresses as the final scene of the documentary after they have emerged triumphantly, and been greeted by Arthur Scargill, from their occupation of the pit. The speeches are slotted in-between the verses of the song *We are Women, we are Strong* (see appendix 6.3). This song runs throughout the documentary and it is through this song and many of the other songs included in the documentary that the women manage to retain their own political narrative drive. Woodruff (1995) comments that the music ‘gives a narrative freedom without disrupting the authority of the actuality, standing outside the action and, if necessary, containing the production’s comments’ (117). For Cheeseman the songs are an opportunity to comment on the action of the documentary, and in this case to highlight a narrative that he is trying to move away from within the narrative of the documentary. Gina, Brenda and Bridget have the final words of the documentary, describing their reasons behind taking part in the sit in. Rose (having stayed outside during the actual sit in), is not given a final speech:

Gina: Conditions were very bad but I’d do it again. I did it for me kids, me husband. This is my children’s bread and butter at the end of the day, and my husband’s job. And I’d do it again.

Bren: I sat in there because we knew what was coming and what we believed in and what we were fightin’ for. And It was about more than just Trentham. It was about savin’ the ’ole coal industry. It was about Tories keep throwin’ the

shit at us and we've gotta say enough's enough – we've got to fight back. And that's what I did it for. And if you fight back you win.

Bridget: I know I speak for hundreds of people when I say that we're angry that miners and their families are put on the scrap heap because we've got a government that doesn't care and it's the same government that doesn't care that we've got coal coming through British ports produced by seven year old kids in Colombia. We've got a government that doesn't care and I can't sit back and let an uncaring government rule our lives or dictate our future and that is why I sat in that pit.

Both Gina and Bridget speak of the future for their families and the families of all the miners and their children who will no longer have jobs to move into or security in the present. Bridget comments on the uncaring attitude of the government who can put these mining families out of work, take away the hope for the next generation and replace them with coal mined by children in terrible conditions in Colombia. The government is accused not only of killing the mining communities of Britain but of encouraging child cruelty in other countries. It is a hard-hitting and emotionally driven political statement, and one that sits side-by-side with Gina's very personal statement of wanting to protect her own children's future and her husband's job. In her interview with me, Brenda acknowledged her satisfaction with Gina's speech, which she felt highlighted the difference between Gina and the other three women. For Brenda this was not only Gina expressing her desire to support her family but also clearly showing her lack of political purpose. The juxtaposition of the speeches helped Brenda to reconcile Gina's role within the documentary with her own perceptions of Gina's role as a 'woman of the working class.' There is a sense in these speeches, that Brenda and Bridget had a higher purpose; they

acted for their families but also for the entire mining community and indeed for all of the working class who may be in struggle throughout the world.

6.9.4 Biographical Narratives

Cheeseman began the interviews with the question 'I would like to ask each one of you, what made you what you are, in terms of your politics' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 1). The question, unlike the rest of the interviews, was far broader than 'the occupation' and its background and demanded personal narratives relating to the women's life-courses. Intergenerational relationships are problematic for Bridget. Her father seems to be a catalyst for the conflict within her early life as she was caught in the cross fire between her father's non-religious, mining world and her mother's Irish Catholic world. For Bridget, her 'real family' does not appear to be the safe place, the community of like-minded people which Rose considers the Miners Wives' Action Group to be or which Steve Granville considers the Vic Theatre to be.

Bridget's maternal family considered Catholicism to be 'in your blood' and she describes her father's Labour politics using the same words, adding that it 'had nothing to do with what you actually do' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 1). Bridget's upbringing can be seen as directly feeding into her ability to work as an activist. She says: 'I suppose that says a lot about myself, cos I don't see it as a big thing that we are activists or that I'm an activist. It's just part of life that you have to struggle, for things, you know' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 1). Her life-course narrative, to fight for what she believes is right, has been moulded from childhood and this has allowed her

to move forward with this narrative without feeling the need to question it. Unlike Rose and Brenda, Bridget's desire to be an activist does not seem to stem from her father being a miner and it is perhaps the lack of or rejection of a 'real family' which drives Bridget to find 'community' within activism, relating to a number of causes. It is this desire to belong which makes Bridget feel guilt at not informing the other women in the group about the occupation plans.

Bridget is aware that by choosing this life-course, she has made alternative narratives far more problematic to achieve, but this awareness does not seem to alter the feeling she has of the inevitability of being an activist. She states 'I don't remember ever sitting down and thinking "now what shall I go for? A career in teaching, or shall I be a political activist?"' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 2). She is aware that she might have liked to have a 'regular' career but that her political activism is likely to have closed this life-course opportunity to her. Having taken part in occupations throughout her early life and up to the pit occupation Bridget recognises that occupations, with a political purpose, have been a feature of her life-course and that, for her, moving outside of the law is an inevitable part of being an activist.

Rose's life-course narrative begins with her talking of being brought up as a 'good Catholic' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 4). And yet it is only when her miner father goes on strike in 1972, when Rose is twelve, that she feels something 'in your soul', she feels a 'churning up inside' and a desire to fight alongside her father and his fellow miners although she is aware that she had no understanding of the political issues surrounding the strike. Rose's family background is one of mixed parentage with an Indian Father and a Scottish Mother. She was

born in Scotland and moved to Stoke-on-Trent at the age of eight where the family took a long time to settle. For Rose 'community' meant miners, she knew no-one else, having been brought up on a mining estate and having left family behind in Scotland. She felt a desire to fight for this community, which was bound up with her feelings for her father, from a very early age. Like Bridget (who considered being a teacher), Rose's desire was to be a nurse and yet she felt that she needed to be earning, to be doing a job; students were looked down upon and to study to become a nurse was not an option. Returning to Scotland to live with her grandparents, Rose met her future husband and eventually decided to return to Stoke, followed by her boyfriend 'which was a bit of a body blow' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 6). It would appear that Rose wanted to forge her own identity and her own way in the world, possibly attempting to break away from the intergenerational expectations which she felt her parents put upon her, but having been followed by her boyfriend, she became as restricted by his presence and expectations as she had been by her parents and inevitably fell pregnant and married, which meant putting life on hold for Rose. Rose's early life-course seems to have been driven by the expected female norms of her working class environment. However, from within this acceptance of these social expectations she has a desire and a drive to be a nurse and to fight for the rights of others. Roses' story is a personal one but one which is located in a particular time and place. As Reissman (2001) points out 'individuals' narratives about their troubles are works of history, as much as they are about individuals, the social spaces they inhabit, and the societies they live in' (604). As such they can illuminate the social processes by which social life and accepted narratives of women's roles and ageing are made to change.

Rose is again prevented from following her desire to support the miners as she becomes pregnant for a second time during the miner's strike of 1985 and is told by her husband and her parents that her role is to care for her unborn child and not to go along with the strike. The expectations of her own family and community are that she should follow the female stereotypical role of mother and carer, and not take on the role of activist and fighter which she longs to do. She states: 'a'll wait till after ar ad the baby, then am getting bloody well stuck in and a don't care what anybody say' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 6). Rose joined the miner's support group in Biddulph in October of the same year, met Bridget and Brenda and for her 'that's when it all started' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 7). For Rose becoming part of an organisation was not enough; she felt a drive to 'do somethin' and began to go to meetings. It was the desire to attend her first official meeting in Coventry which forced Rose to shift her role within the family from that of mother and supporter, to activist and fighter. Her first reaction when asked to attend the meeting is 'I'm getting in too deep. Me mother'll kill me' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 7). There is intergenerational conflict here which links with the conflict seen in the Wilkinson scene analysis. Rose has to fight her own fears and the stereotyped view of female behaviour which she has been brought up with but her desire to fight and 'to do somethin' wins through and she is able to stand up to her mother and husband, with the encouragement of Bridget, and inform her husband that she will not be at home the next day as she is going to a political meeting with the Miners Wives' Action Group. For Rose this is the point at which she felt a shift in herself and became an activist, she describes it as 'Me turning point' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 8). Once the strike came to an end Rose felt 'bereft'. She describes the Miners Wives' Action Group as feeling like a 'family' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 7)

and that family is now dispersed. It is interesting to consider this statement in relation to the feeling of 'family' that the Vic created for Granville and for many of those who were involved with it. For Bridget, Brenda and Rose, the Miners Wives' Action Group takes on this role of family, of being at the centre of a community. The Vic does not feel like a family to them or like a part of their own community; they still feel dislocated from it. Their 'family' ties and commitments lie elsewhere.

Gina begins her narrative by describing her parents as 'dead meek' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 9) compared to the families of the other women. Both parents came from Wales and moved to Stoke for work as the pits in Wales began to shut down. Unlike Rose and Bridget, who were aware of their parents' strike activity and struggles from a very early age, Gina begins her own awareness of strike activity when she has just begun work herself. She recalls her colleagues speaking negatively about the 'bloody pissin miners' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 9) and feeling the need to stick up for her father who was a striking miner at the time. All of the women other than Bridget position their fathers as central figures within their narratives. This intergenerational bond begins and focuses their desire to be activists. It is intriguing that Gina (who swears throughout the documentary and within her interview) talks here about her strict upbringing and how swearing was not acceptable in her family home. Gina makes the point that she would still be afraid to swear at home or 'a'd get killed.' She goes on to say that she uses swearing as a defence mechanism in order to appear stronger than she feels: 'why I swear a lot and act tough, is because I'm so scared inside, and that's a front' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 13). Much of Gina's narrative revolves around being afraid: she is

afraid of Brenda when she first encounters her, saying, 'She looks really scary to me' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 9).

Gina's world has revolved around intergenerational relationships within her family, both the one she was brought up within (along with ten siblings) and the one which she and her husband have created where 'he was on the picket lines, day in, day out, so I stayed at home with the two children' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 9). She has not been involved with any political activity 'only knowin' my family's struggle, but not doin' nothing about it.' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 10) until she was brought into action by Brenda, Bridget and Rose. Gina is 'pushed' into attending political meetings and giving speeches feeling 'shit scared' but she overcomes this fear and is proud of herself for doing so. Gina feels that her life in comparison to the lives of the other women is 'very meek and mild' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 13). The life-course narrative which Gina tells here leads directly to her participation within the occupation of the mine: she is last resort for the women, and her lack of previous involvement in any political activities explains the women's reticence in asking her, and yet she has overcome her fears in the past and does again within this setting, proving herself to be a stronger woman than either the other women or she thought she was.

It is interesting that these three women have families with links to other countries. Their understandings of community are formed through their links to mining, activism and eventually Stoke. Place would seem to play a lesser role for all three than family and intergenerational links to mining, which form the centre of the women's 'community'. Whilst the links to mining and family are both explicit and implicit within the finished documentary, the material relating

to the women's family ties outside of the stoke 'community' do not make it through into the finished show.

'Brenda's Story' as Cheeseman entitles it within the transcriptions, recounts growing up in a rough area of Stoke, with her 'ole life' revolving around the pit. As part of a 'poor workin' class family' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 14) she remembers her family struggling financially when she was little and believes that coming from such an environment meant that she had to 'rough it for survive, or you go under' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 14) and it is this which has created the frightening and hard persona which Gina and Rose both experienced before getting to know Brenda. Brenda was the eldest of two children and grew up hardly seeing her parents, who both worked full time, her father in the pit and mother in the pottery industry. Brenda's activist life narrative is based on an intergenerational family history which she recalls through a description of a house full of black and white photos of dead relatives who had been killed in pit accidents and feels that her entire life 'revolved around round, you know, belonging to the minin' community really' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 15). She goes on to say "'s my family, the pit, it involves the ole family' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 22). It is not only that her family has been involved in the pit for generations, but also that she feels so connected to the pit community that it has become her family.

Brenda's hatred of the police did not stem from political activity but from the fact she saw them as the establishment and growing up in the 60s for Brenda meant being anti-establishment and existing outside of the law. Brenda took part in the illegal activity going on in and around her housing estate and feels that 'y'either fitted in with the crowd, or you weren't

one of them' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 18). For Brenda there was no choice but to fit in as she wanted to be part of the gang and 'in' with the right people, she says; 'av always bin involved in gangs. Av never bin a loner. I've always bin involved with people you know' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 18). Brenda, like Bridget, appears to have found an alternative 'family' into which she feels a desire and need to fit. It is not surprising that Brenda was a formidable and frightening character to Rose and Gina, who clearly knew of her reputation. It was when the police knocked on Brenda's parents' door asking to interview her about a murder that Brenda realised she had to change her ways. She was offered the opportunity to continue at school, due to her excellent examination grades in English, but felt the social pressure from her peers to reject this offer and found a job in the pottery industry, taking on the role of shop steward, which became her 'very first startin' point in politics' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 20). Intergenerational tensions between Brenda and her parents also helped to shape Brenda's life-course. She describes them as 'dead, dead old-fashioned' and believes that 'they go on people by what they look like' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 20). It was because of this that Brenda felt unable to be with the man she loved, who was a biker, with long hair and not accepted by her mother, and ended up marrying a different man who 'ad short air, and a decent job and e'd gorra car' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 20). Brenda feels that 'A think it was really for me Mum and me family, I er, I dropped Ken. And a married' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 20). It is surprising that family and intergenerational expectations should play such a large role in shaping Brenda's life-course when she has been such a rebel. It is perhaps because Brenda recognises the need to distance herself from her old 'family' of gang members and those operating outside of the law, that she needs the acceptance of her birth family and is willing to accept their values in order to

'fit in'. This overriding desire to be part of a familial community, at the expense of other life-course choices and desires, can also be seen through Rose and Bridget's choices to become activists rather than a teacher or a nurse. It is interesting that, like Brenda, Rose and Gina also feel intergenerational pressure from their parents although the stories these older generations tell are again not ones which the women believe in or want to hear. They state:

ROSE: I'll tell you something, when I really took up wi the group, there was nothing but fights, rows and arguments for years. And I didn't just ave Dave on me back ad me mum and dad as well. BRID: Yeah. ROSE: Cos it was all – they could always get to me with the kids, 'you've got them kids to think about.' OVERLAPS. GINA: I always remember comin out the occupation, and fallin into my mum's arms, and cryin. ROSE: Oh I can. GINA: Cryin me eyes out and my mum sayin – first words she said to me was. 'Now Gina, go back to your home life, go back.' ROSE: (over) A know. GINA: 'And settle down, and don't do anything, don't do anythin' ROSE (over) 'Don't do this again'. GINA: 'Like this ever again' (MUSH Transcriptions 8: 22 – as original).

Gina and Rose both seem to have had similar intergenerational clashes with their parents. This older generation is perceived as using the younger generation as tools to create feelings of guilt for those in the middle, linking back to discussions above about the wave of feminism prevalent in the 1990s and what could be seen as ageist and sexist attitudes. The women activists' actions in *Nice Girls* would appear to be in direct opposition to the socially constructed norms of female behaviour and yet, as Woodruff points out, their actions did not come out of nowhere, they were 'the culmination of a lifetime of bitter memories and learning experiences' (120).

Woodruff goes on to reiterate Cheeseman's belief that 'it is through the story that the politics will emerge. The theatre acts as the advocate of the people who live the events, and it is up to the audience to discover the truth behind the tale' (118). It is a 'truth' that is shaped by Cheeseman through his privileging of certain aspects of the actuality over others. Whilst he follows the traditions of 'history from below', showing the flesh and blood working people as the makers of history through their own resistance to oppression, victories and defeats, he also emphasises certain areas of the actuality over others. As in *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, he suppresses elements of 'community' disagreement, marginalising those elements of the community who disagreed with the women's action and restricting the generalisation of the political significance of the action.

The biographical interviews offer a deeper layer of narrative about the women from that presented within the documentary. The women have come from diverse backgrounds in terms of location, but all have the mining community in common and have ended up in Stoke. They have encouraged each other to become activists, with Bridget taking the role of teacher and guide, being the most experienced activist and the most confident spokesperson. Family/intergenerational relationships and community are very much tied together for the women with Bridget seeking activism as a 'community' to replace the family which she left at such an early age. For the women, supporting their mining and familial community is a natural life-course progression, having been steeped in the mining world from such early ages. Yet taking on such a key activist role is also something which goes against the stereotyped female role which all, other than Bridget, have accepted (in Brenda and Rose's case somewhat reluctantly) up until this point. For Cheeseman this material was used as background/reference

material and not included in the finished production and yet it offers a deeper and fuller picture of the women, helping to explain why their life-courses have led to these final speeches which are presented in the documentary.

6.10 Conclusion

Ideology and logistics have both played a part in the making of the documentary. The size of the company is a reflection of the theatre economics of the 1990s but this in turn meant that the four actresses were linked in the minds of the audience with the four activists (which seems to have been encouraged by Cheeseman through his ‘type’ casting), highlighting the key theme of representation which runs throughout this chapter. This emphasised the personal stories of the women rather than the political narrative which the women activists believed was the main purpose of the documentary. Cheeseman does not explore the life-course of these women which led to them being the activists that we see on stage – we see a particular ‘snapshot’ of their existence, through Cheeseman’s lens. The exploration of the archive and the narratives of the women contained within it allows us to step back in time and see the women from childhood (though clearly we are only hearing the stories which Cheeseman asks them to tell and which they wish to tell) and this linked with the plays I have created, offers a further layer to the bricolage of material through which the themes of family, community and intergenerational relationships are discussed and advanced.

The bricolage of my own play, and textual source analyses, offers a view of the ‘truths’ behind the documentary and ultimately leads to a better understanding of the life-courses of these participants, offering an indication of what these participants consider to be successful

ageing. If we accept Andrew's (2009: 5) argument that 'successful aging means to believe that the journey one has taken has had meaning – to oneself and to others – even though the meaning itself may have changed over time,' the women activists and the performers would appear to consider themselves to have aged successfully whilst acknowledging that the 'meaning' within their life-courses has shifted over time. For the activists, this transition has come from a greater understanding and acceptance of the world outside of their local community and, for the performers, this transition has come from a greater acceptance of self in relation to career, life opportunities and an ability to relocate their previously acquired knowledge and skills.

Chapter Seven

Modest Connections

Artistic activity, for its part, strives to achieve modest connections, open[s] up (One or two) obstructed passages, and connects levels of reality kept apart from one another (Bourriaud 2002: 8)

The documentaries *Nice Girls* and *Fight for Shelton Bar!* both strive to achieve ‘modest connections’ between the theatre and the community – to licence affective engagement. For Cheeseman and the research committees the obstructed passages which he is attempting to open are very specific. In *Fight for Shelton Bar!* they involve a better understanding of the close-knit and committed community of employees within Shelton Bar steel works, dedicated to preserving, in their own words ‘their history and their heritage’ and the intergenerational threat to the whole district which the closing of the steel works would create. In *Nice Girls* the obstructed passages which the documentary opens up again involve the community and industry but this time in the form of the Miners Wives’ Action Group. The documentary interprets events from a working-class perspective, ‘representing the views of the political activists while remaining accessible to the broad mass of working people’ (Woodruff 1995: 109). These are the driving narratives of Cheeseman and his research committees. ‘It is propaganda of a kind, but propaganda that works not by bullying and terrorising but by evoking sympathy and understanding’ (Cheeseman 1977: i). Intergenerational impact is a theme which both documentaries highlight in order to ‘evoke sympathy and understanding’, but it is not the driving narrative of the ‘propaganda’. This thesis has throughout used ‘artistic activity’ in order to make ‘modest connections’ between the two documentaries and ageing, the life-course and intergenerational relationships as this is where my own narrative focus lies, ‘connecting levels

of reality kept apart from one another' through the original documentary, the archived material and the contemporary interviews. Using this bricolage I uncover the documentaries as layered performance spaces in which attitudes to ageing, intergenerational relationships and the life-course emerge.

I now reiterate my primary research questions and then go onto discuss how the thesis answers these questions through the thematic threads which have been drawn out in the connections through and across the narratives from all three sources. I then go onto suggest the limitations of this study as well as the originality of it and what it contributes to current literature. The chapter concludes by suggesting possible further research. My primary research questions were:

What narratives of the life-course, ageing and intergenerational relations do selected documentaries from Cheeseman's repertoire, namely *Nice Girls* and *Fight for Shelton Bar!*, reveal?

What kinds of impact did being involved with the Victoria Theatre/New Vic documentaries have on individuals' lives and their engagement with their community'?

This thesis reveals narratives found within the original documentaries and/or the archive about ageing and its emotional impact (particularly in relation to retirement) and juxtaposes these with resonant contemporary narratives within my own plays at the same time uncovering the impact which working at the theatre, and on the documentaries, had on the experience of ageing and 'retiring' for the performers. Narratives of ageing in relation to place

and community are also uncovered; showing the shifting relationship which individuals have with the theatre and the community over their life-course: the narratives highlight the importance of choice and control as participants age; choice of job/activism, control over timing with regard to retirement and choice of place and community in which to live and work. They become alternative iterations of the story that the community could tell of itself, creating intergenerational connections, accessible through the archive.

These intergenerational narratives handed down through families and recorded in the interviews retained in the archive reveal the impact which family history has had on the participants and their sense of belonging and need to fight for their communities. The community are telling their own stories to themselves, thus fulfilling the role of the older generation. The archive offers a lasting legacy, extending and expanding the role of the documentary for generations to come. Intergenerational narratives also reveal the perceived need for older members of the community to educate younger members within the community; passing down knowledge across generations. The thesis also reveals contemporary narratives which question and complicate these narratives of intergenerational 'education'.

The original Vic documentaries played an important role in bringing together generations – both in the process of creating the documentaries, in which young actors (such as Polly) interviewed older people – and in terms of younger actors 'representing' older participants within the documentaries. The 'Stoke method' allowed younger actors to represent older characters on stage, whilst the presence of the 'real' sources in rehearsal meant that both performers and sources became very aware of their own and others' perceived self-identity.

Narratives relating to representation by performers of similar ages to the participants (as shown through *Nice Girls*) also reveal clashes between historical truth and narrative truth, 'reality' and theatrical representation. This theme of 'representation' also relates to identity and perceptions of self identity throughout the life-course of the participants. Narratives explored within this thesis reveal a desire to re-build identities as participants age, creating new identities for example as something other than an actor, as a retired person, as an activist, or as someone who no longer belongs to the community of Shelton Bar. Intergenerational narratives – as seen through Chris's narratives relating to working at Staffordshire University – also reveal shifts in identity as participants' age, in relation to a younger generation.

The thesis discovers themes of representation (as discussed above) and transitions finding that these thematic threads exist within both documentaries but they take on alternative meanings in both. By using a life-course approach to the research and by juxtaposing the archival material with the contemporary narratives the thesis is able to suggest connections between the early lives of the women activists and their eventual roles within the sit-in at Trentham Colliery; it thus forges links between the ageing of the women, intergenerational relationships and the *Nice Girls* documentary. I suggest that a performer's experience of ageing is shaped by their profession; it is a gendered experience, and one which often requires the actor to transition into an alternative career in order to gain stability and a perception of successful ageing.

A number of thematic threads run through both documentaries, connecting them and highlighting shifts, developments and new meanings created through time. The themes of

representation and transitions are threads which run throughout the thesis. They relate to identity, both professional and social. This suggests that these are the primary impacts which being involved with the Vic/New Vic documentaries had on individuals' lives and their engagement with their community. I find that both documentaries create links between the theatre and family, education, generational issues, representation, transitions including retirement as well as the community; they uncover the extent to which Cheeseman achieved his goals for documentary drama and the Vic theatre in giving voice to the local community (Cheeseman 1988).

The primary themes of family and community demonstrate that the 'family' feeling provided a sense of social and moral support and camaraderie for actors at a formative time in their lives. The sense of family was also founded in Cheeseman himself and his vision of a permanent company rooted in the area. Education, which played an important role in this 'family', becomes a cross-thread through the documentaries and Polly Warren's notions of the archive as education for future generations. The documentaries become an education for those involved, the Vic becomes an educative space for the performers, and the archive takes on its own educative function.

Though participants talked about family in very positive ways, there is another side to this metaphor. Actors felt a great sense of obligation to the theatre. Steve Granville said that the main reason he left the Vic was that he was increasingly exhausted and did not feel able to maintain his levels of energy and commitment any longer. Chris Martin felt that he lost his own identity through playing so many parts and though he had a huge a sense of loss and sadness at

Peter Cheeseman's death he also recognised a sense of release. There may be, therefore, an oppressive element to this working 'family', much as it can be supportive and affirming.

The thesis also suggests a number of understandings of community, embodied in particular in the familial metaphor discussed above, which is broadened within this thesis into an exploration of the familial bonds which existed not only within the theatre but between the theatre and its immediate environment, and within the communities of Shelton Bar steel works and of the Miners Wives' Action Group. These community and familial bonds crossed generations and shifted as the theatre aged and moved location and as the steel works and the mines closed. There is also a broader sense of community – an imagined community between the theatre company, the audience and the documentary participants; created in part by the design of the theatre and by the documentary creation process. The thesis suggests that the documentaries shaped a sense of community through their omissions and exclusions and contributes to literature surrounding the documentaries by confirming and extending Woodruff's research in that 'Cheeseman's job is to make theatre relevant to the whole community. It is no purpose of the Vic documentary to accentuate the divisions which already exist' (1995: 124). The textual source analyses support this statement for both *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls*.

7.1 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are mainly logistical. More complex narratives could have been presented had a greater number of the original actors and participants of both

documentaries been available to participate; however, the nature of studying ageing and the life-course has meant that many prospective participants are no longer traceable or indeed no longer living. Nevertheless, the small number of participants has enabled me to look in-depth at each narrative and make connections through and across them without the aid of computer analysis which might have detracted from the personal nature of the research, preventing me from seeing the full complexity of the stories I was hearing and losing the idea that 'stories go in circles' (Metzger 1992: 104). This would have taken the personal resonances which were so important in the creation of the dramatic scripts and unbalanced the in-depth qualitative nature of my research.

Although it draws on disciplines including performance studies and performative social science, the thesis focuses more on narrative than on issues of performance per se; as such it does not engage with dramaturgical considerations and terms to any great extent. However, in engaging more fully with performative social science methodology and the specifics of dramaturgical theory (for example Pfister 1988; Spencer 2002), the thesis would have gained in particular from a greater use of dramatic techniques within the plays. Presenting some of the narrative material in a more artful and theatrical manner would have pointed to the wider language of theatre (as the make-up scene did in the autoethnographic play within the introduction) and have said more without words. Taking into account dramaturgical terminology and the work of McGrath (1981) and Bennett (1997) on community and audience would also have allowed for a greater clarity in the analysis of my own scripts.

However, had I adopted this approach, it would also have had important implications for the relationship between the interview material and theatrical representation within the thesis. This way of working might have privileged narrative and performative reality over historical reality to an extent that the thesis would have risked losing the historical ‘truth’ as presented by the participants, further complicating the already loaded relationship between ethics and aesthetics. To a large extent, this issue highlights the problematic nature of performative social science in terms of its relationship with historical ‘truth’. I have foregrounded this problem within the thesis by using a play format to present the narratives of my participants precisely because it produces certain limitations, creating exclusions much as the documentaries themselves did. An example of these limitations can be seen through the omission from the play *Working Round Here: Stories From Two of the Original Participants of Fight for Shelton Bar!* of Ken’s narratives about growing up as a child in Stoke (discussed in Chapter Five). It is because of these limitations that the analysis of narrative (Polkinghorne 1995) sections of the thesis are crucial.

It is interesting to consider that my initial methodological choices were to present the narratives as dramatic scripts without any analytical commentary in order to allow the ‘audience’ to find their own connections, believing that by doing this I was preventing myself from offering ‘interpretive omnipotence’ (Smith and Sparkes 2008: 21) within the research. However, I have recognised through the process of creating the plays, and researching the thesis as a whole, that this would have left large parts of the participant’s narratives untold and as such could have given a biased and incomplete version of the ‘truth’ as experienced by the participants and presented to the ‘audience’. In offering analytical commentary and plays side

by side I am acknowledging the limitations of a performative social science methodology and supplying an alternative analysis to fill in the gaps which might otherwise have been present.

7.2 Originality

This work is original because of its methodological bricolage, using material from interviews and the archive and presenting the findings through plays. This allows the narratives to speak for themselves within the plays, whilst the analysis of narrative (Polkinghorne 1995) enables me to present the thematic strands of the stories as I see them, taking an open and reflexive standpoint in order to ensure that the research process is transparent and ethical. The contemporary narratives gleaned from interviews offer a further layer to the material held in the archive and to the original documentaries. Juxtaposing the archival material and contemporary narratives offers an original way of viewing the life-courses of those involved in the documentaries.

7.3 Contribution to Knowledge

The thesis contributes to knowledge by enabling the reader to experience alternative narratives to those presented through the finished documentaries and to gain a deeper understanding of personal experiences of ageing and community engagement; in addition, it raises questions with regard to embedded ideological assumptions. In the case of this thesis these relate to a set of ideas with regard to ageing, a received consciousness, proposed by the

dominant class and for the most part accepted by its members, thus helping us to contextualise gerontological knowledge. The archival research helps the audience to ‘understand the complexities of the past’ by offering a ‘differentiated particular’ (Morgan-Fleming *et al* 2007: 82).

My work confirms other critical gerontological approaches to research in that it uses narratives to explore the ‘lived experience’ of ageing and to share an ‘ability to confront (rather than shrink) the ambiguities and complexities of age’ (Zeillig 2011: 9). In using dramatic scripts to present the narratives of my participants I link their experiences, highlighting these ambiguities and complexities and acknowledging art’s ability to express meaning rather than to state meaning. Like Pelias (2005), Zeilig (2011) and Jones (2006), I believe in the methodological power of performative writing in shaping the audience’s view by evoking experience rather than recording it. It enables the audience/reader to come to their own conclusions and find their own resonances with the narratives. In common with Bornat’s research, I find that narrative interviews enabled my participants to ‘reflect on past experience’ (2002: 121) and make sense of their current situation in relation to their life-course. The creation of this thesis goes further than Bornat suggests by enabling the audience to also ‘reflect on past experience’ through the layering of the archival material alongside the plays, and to then make new sense and new meanings relating to ageing, intergenerational relationships and the life-course.

7.4 Possible Future Research

The findings of this study point to a range of possibilities for future research. The study focused on a necessarily small number of performers, all working at the Vic or New Vic theatre. A further study exploring performers from various theatrical backgrounds could build on the theme of transitions in middle to older age which my own research highlights. Research could also further expand an understanding of these age-related transitions by exploring high-profile performers who have continued to work in performance, successfully into older age. This research may also illuminate meanings for performers who seek a successful route to 'positive' ageing.

Further research would also be useful in assessing the impact of engagement with theatre-in-the-round and documentary/verbatim theatrical productions in other geographical locations. My own research was very specifically tied to location, theatre and the figure of Peter Cheeseman. Conducting further research in other geographical locations (for instance Scarborough) would create a broader picture of engagement over a life-course with theatre-in-the-round; broadening the results of this thesis. Exploring older people's experiences of being sources for documentaries at other theatres, such as the Tricycle Theatre, or amateur groups like London Bubble, would enable a more complete and possibly contrasting picture to be developed about how arts engagement has shaped peoples later life.

Finally, the rise in interest in working creatively with research data, as is highlighted by arts-based projects within The New Dynamics of Ageing programme (NDA 2013), points to a positive acceptance of the validity and reliability of such creative modes of research. For

example, 'Gay and Pleasant Land?' (Jones 2009), funded by the NDA programme, presented its findings as a short, professionally produced film, and 'Ages and Stages' itself presented some of its findings in the form of a piece of documentary drama and connected exhibition (Ages and Stages 2013). There is a potential to undertake research which uses narratives as a starting point, moving away from scripted work and working with a choreographer and dance company and transforming narratives into a piece of dance based on the themes drawn out from the data. In this way the narratives can be understood in very different ways by the performers and the audience; illuminating alternative meanings and 'connecting levels of reality kept apart from one another' whilst exploring the 'differentiated particular'.

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Appendices

The Circle of Life: Narrative, performativity and ageing in Peter Cheeseman's
documentary dramas *Fight for Shelton Bar!* and *Nice Girls*

Ruth Elizabeth Basten

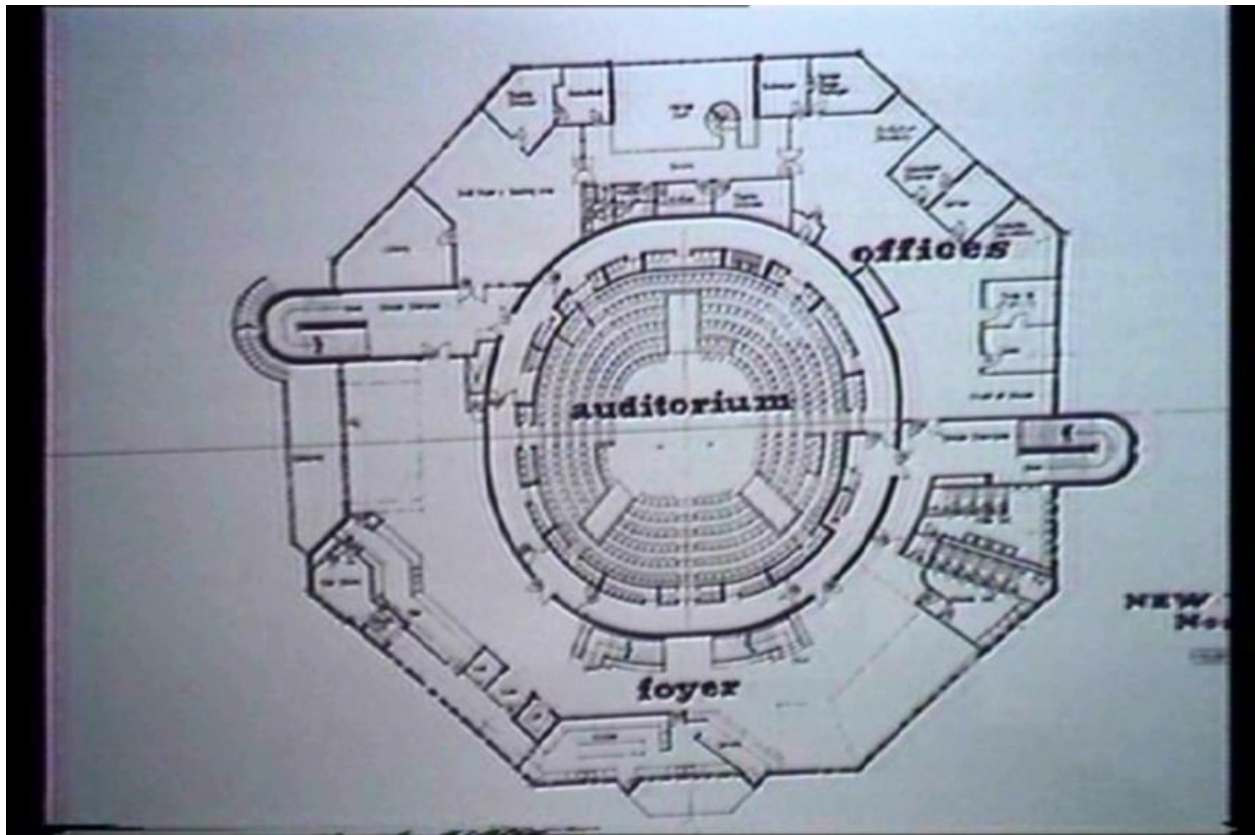
Doctor of Philosophy in English

June 2014

Keele University

Appendix 1.1

Explanation of stage directions:



All directions are taken from the point of view of the actor

UC – Up Stage Centre (at the Vic this entrance is only available to the performers)

DL – Down stage left

DR – Down stage right

CL – Centre stage left

CR – Centre stage right

CS – Centre stage

The UC, DL and DR entrances are called vomitoriums (Voms)

At the Vic theatre there are stairs CL and CR and down centre (DC) which can also be used as entrances

NEW VIC FILE

THEATRE POLICY STATEMENT

Brief summary of Artistic Policy written for the Arts Council by the Theatre Director (extracted from New Victoria Theatre 3 Year Plan 1994 - 1997)

The theatre continues to develop its traditional policy, now enhanced by the opportunities afforded by the new building with a secondary performing area, and substantial foyers for additional activities.

The theatre's aims are:

- to present a diverse and rich programme of new plays and classical plays, attracting as wide a range of audience as possible from the community and including productions specially mounted for young people
- to explore and reflect the life and history of the local community on the stage and in the exhibition spaces
- to strive for the highest standards of quality and performance
- to provide a space for the performance of music, dance and poetry, and the exhibition of fine art and crafts
- to provide a space for performances by touring companies which complement the theatre's productions
- to share the specialist skills embodied within the staff for the widest use within the community

The theatre sets out to achieve this policy through the following means:

- by choosing plays with as much variation as possible in subject matter and style within the compass of each season
- by continuing to develop innovative styles of presentation, particularly in co-operation with the writers of new plays and in the presentation of new theatre documentaries
- by consistently undertaking research into the life and history of the local community in co-operation with playwrights and towards the presentation of documentary productions
- by balancing the need to maintain the highest literary standards with the need to ensure accessibility of the theatre's work to the widest possible audience
- by pursuing an equal opportunities policy, with regard to both employment and audience
- by providing a mixed programme of concerts and other special events, along with foyer activities and exhibitions, to enrich and vary the theatre's programme
- by providing attractive and welcoming surroundings for the public, including reasonably priced catering and bars, principally aimed to serve the audience for theatre presentations
- by developing the education programme to make the theatre's professional skills available to schools, colleges, teachers and adult groups, and in fact the whole community.

Research Information Leaflet

Study Title: *The circle of life*: A narrative research project looking at the role of theatre in representations and recollections of ageing (with specific reference to Peter Cheeseman's musical documentary drama of The Victoria Theatre and New Vic Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent).

Aims of the Research

The main aims of my research are:

- To explore what impact The Victoria Theatre musical documentaries, (with special reference to *Fight for Shelton Bar* and *Nice Girls*), had on those involved, especially with regard to their links with their communities both within the theatre and within Stoke-on-Trent.
- To investigate the ways in which ageing and intergenerational relations have been constructed and portrayed in 'Fight for Shelton Bar' and 'Nice Girls'.
- To examine archival material in order to contextualise;
The productions
The Victoria theatre in relation to the finished productions
The responses of those involved

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in this research. This project is being carried out by Ruth Basten, a PhD student at Keele University. It is linked to a larger research project entitled *Ages and Stages* which is being run by Keele University in partnership with the New Vic Theatre.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Please feel free to ask me if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in this study because either you have worked at the Old or New Vic Theatre on either *Fight for Shelton Bar* and/or *Nice Girls*, and lived

in the local area or you took part in research carried out by the Old and New Vic Theatres in preparation for Fight for Shelton Bar or Nice Girls.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?

If you decide to take part I will record an interview with you, which will take around an hour. You can be interviewed in your own home or another location that is convenient. I may ask if I can do a follow up interview with you which is completely optional. The 'interviews' will be run more as conversations as I am interested in your stories of, and experiences at, the Vic theatre and/or New Vic Theatre over the years, with specific reference to Fight for Shelton Bar and/or Nice Girls, and how the theatre has fitted into your life. I will explain the research project again on the interview date to make sure that you are happy to take part.

If I take part, what do I have to do?

I will contact you to arrange a date, time and location for the interview. At the start of the interview, I will ask you to sign two consent forms - one will be for you to keep and the other is for my records. If you need to rearrange for any reason, you can contact me on via Tracey Harrison at Keele University on 01782 733846. At the end of the interview, I will ask if you might be available to take part in a further interview at a later date; this will be completely voluntary.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

I hope that you will enjoy the interview, and the opportunity to share your memories and experiences of the two productions and of the Vic and New Vic Theatres. Once the research is finished parts of it will feed into the larger *Ages and Stages* project which will be making recommendations about the ways that older people can be involved in theatre and the arts, in order to improve the quality of their lives. We hope that this will benefit older people in the Potteries and beyond.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to me and I will do my best to answer your questions. You can contact me (Ruth Basten on 01782 733845 or via email at r.e.basten@ihum.keele.ac.uk)

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton
 Research Governance Officer
 Research & Enterprise Services
 Dorothy Hodgkin Building
 Keele University
 ST5 5BG

How will information about me be used?

I will record and transcribe your interview so that it can be analysed as part of my research. I may also use material from the interviews to help me put together a documentary theatre script. With your agreement, I will share your interview material with the *Ages and Stages* project team. The team will be developing a new documentary performance to be put on at the New Vic Theatre towards the end of the project.

Documentary drama is about real people and is primarily based on their first hand accounts. However, it will be entirely up to you to decide whether you would like me to use your real name or if you would prefer to remain anonymous. I am happy to ensure this, will change your name in the interview transcript and will make sure that you are not personally identified.

Who will have access to information about me?

The interview recordings and transcripts will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer. As explained above, I will change your name in the interview transcript and make sure that you cannot be identified, unless you wish otherwise. The interview data will be stored and retained in line with ESRC (our sponsor) guidelines. If you agree to sign the 'consent form for quotes', your quotes may be used within my dissertation and with suitable clearance may also be used in subsequent publications.

Who is funding and organising the research?

This research is part of my PhD at Keele University where I receive a scholarship from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The *Ages and Stages* project is part of the national 'New Dynamics of Ageing' research programme, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

Contact for further information

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Ruth Basten, if you require further information. My telephone number is 01782 733845

If you would like to take part in this research, please complete the attached form and I will contact you to arrange an interview.



KEELE
UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC SERVICES DIRECTORATE
RESEARCH SERVICES

5 January 2010

Ms Ruth Basten
Room CM1.16
Claus Moser Building

Dear Ruth

Re: 'The Circles of Life: the role of theatre in representations and recollection of ageing (with specific reference to Peter Cheeseman's musical documentary drama of The Victoria Theatre and New Vic Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent; both of which were and are 'theatre in the round').

Thank you for submitting your revised project for review.

I am pleased to inform you that your project has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel.

Amendments to your project after a favourable ethical opinion has been given must be notified to the Ethical Review Panel. If there are any amendments to your project please contact Nicola Leighton Research Governance Officer
n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Michele Dawson in writing to m.dawson@uso.keele.ac.uk

Yours sincerely

Dr Nicky Edelstyn
Chair – Ethics Review Panel.

cc RI Manager

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: *The circle of life*

Name of PhD student: Ruth Basten

Please tick box

- 1 I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
- 2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time ☐
- 3 I agree to take part in this study. ☐
- 4 I understand that the data collected about me during this study will be anonymised, unless I request otherwise. ☐
- 5 I agree to the interview being audio taped. ☐
- 6 I agree to allow the data collected to be used as a resource for a possible theatre production and to be used for other future research projects. ☐
- 7 I agree to allow my transcript to be shared with the 'Ages and Stages' project team. ☐
- 8 I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects. ☐
- 9 I agree to be contacted by Ruth for a possible follow up interview ☐

Name of participant	Date	Signature
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Researcher	Date	Signature
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CONSENT FORM

(for use of quotes)

Title of Project: *The circle of life*

Name of PhD student: Ruth Basten

Please tick box

- 1 I am happy for any quotes to be used

- 2 I don't want any quotes to be used

- 3 I want to see any proposed quotes before making a decision

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Map of the Victoria Theatre / Peter Cheeseman Archive



Number three pass comin in the main stand, into the edger, speed matchin correct, elongatin' to 'bout 'undred 'n twenty foot.

Fourth pass entr'in the edger, into the main stand, . . . er, elongatin to approximately 'undred 'n eighty foot, 'undred 'n ninety foot.

The last pass comin up, which is Number five, main stand, edger, that's the last pass, elongatin ter two 'undred, two 'undred 'n ten foot, two 'undred 'n twenty foot. (*The section rolls away to the finishing stand.*) An it goes down to the finishing pair of rolls, which is a finishing process.

Herbert goes away. Frank reflects for a moment.

I realise now – I'm a roller in the finest beam mill in Western Europe, and to me it's an achievement. Well I think so.

He goes. The lights change to the sparsely lit inside of the canteen in the mill. Men assemble for a meeting. Some are in the green coloured helmets of the mill. Chairs are put out in a group roughly facing a small table where Ted Smith and Frank Oldacre will sit to address them.

Mill Meeting

HERBERT (*coming in with an Action Committee brochure*): Shelton Works Action Committee. Brochure. (*He thumbs through to page seven and reads:*) 'In these, or any circumstances, the Action Committee is not prepared to close the Works piecemeal; the BSC must decide if it wants an integrated works based on electric arc steel-making or no works at all. The mill will not roll cold steel from Scunthorpe.'

The men look troubled and hand round the brochure. Dennis Storer speaks to the audience.

DENNIS: Well if we're to believe what's being said, and we don't know yet, there's a small section of our brochure that appears to upset the people in the

Mill, but we don't know yet, we've not spoken to them. Well, we're saying we won't roll the Scunthorpe product, but we did discuss it at the meeting when we were sort of getting the brochure ready, and it was approved at the meeting, you know.

Ted and Frank are now at the table. The men listen, some sitting, some standing. Frank has risen to speak.

FRANK: Now you know as well as I do this as 'ad to come. You've all known the last three years, this. There's nobody taken any notice 'til just recently, you've 'ad the bloody chop when Melchett come down an nobody's taken any notice, now this is come now – Finniston's come, Andrew Young come down give us the brush off – Finniston's probably come an' finish it off in June. Now you've got the bloody wind up – I don't blame you, your future's at stake.

I go along with you – I want to work. I've got ten years to go – I want t'finish that off – I've got a future here, the young 'uns 'ave still got a future if we can get the stuff – if that place closes we've all 'ad it – Anyway, I've asked Ted t'come along – he's volunteered, he's not feeling too good, so I'd like Ted just to take over from there – but mark me out, don't let's get the idea that we're sitting pretty in the mill – let's face up to reality.

TED (*gets up, and begins quietly*): Thank you very much Frank – I welcome this opportunity, lads, of addressing you, on a point of communications. I know how you feel, because I'm tied to this mill as well as you are. I've got a job with the mill, when the steel plant closes – what are we doing here fighting for – for the rest of the Works? Because we're charged with a responsibility, for 2,700 steelworkers and their families, 10,000 people in Stoke-on-Trent depend on you. (*He pauses.*) I want to talk about isolation in this address. We are isolated here – as a steel plant, as a mill, as a blast furnace, as a community. Everybody relies on everybody else in a steel-

works. We're dependent on the blast furnaces for iron, we're dependent on the steel plant for steel, we're dependent on the mill and the finishing mill for product, and our profitability. (*He pauses again.*) I've only worked here 20 years – it isn't a good while to some of you. Like Ernie there, and Frank and Jack. But I've watched men give their lives for this industry. We all have. We saw a great mill-fitter – as far as I was concerned he was my best friend mate – a part of me died when he did – that was Tommy Cooper! (*Tommy Cooper's two sons are amongst the men. One looks down at the floor. Another man looks across at him, then at Ted.*) After Melchett's visit on March 27, George Harris asked me what I thought was happening. I said to him, 'It's murder by economics.' Well, I've changed me opinion, I've changed it. I now charge the BSC with economic genocide.

There's 75,000 steelworkers being destroyed by a masterplan. They've never been given the opportunity of proving their value. £3,000 million spent to prove a point. And 15 years from now they'll want another £3,000 million and they'll want those 75,000 steelworkers who they've cut the throats of. I listened to Jo Gornley tonight. He's screaming out for miners and they're on a 39 quid a week. My God, he should be screaming out for 'em for that price. They've driven men out of the mines. They've closed pits down that are uneconomic. And what I would say to you now lads, I'd ask the mill men to show the same red badge of courage as the blastfurnace men. Go out and spread the gospel – it's our intention to fight for this works as a whole unit. (*Ted is now in full flow. He gestures, passionately, to drive home his next points.*) At the moment, you've got a weapon, but come 1978-79-80 – you won't 'ave a weapon. You can't say to the Steel Corporation – You bugger off, we're 'avin that mill, we'll roll in that mill – what y'gonna roll with, chewing gum?

You can do it now, but you won't be able to do it then. We could use that power now to keep this Works as one unit, but once you stand isolated . . . be alone . . . be apart. (*He makes a gesture of hopelessness, then finishes quietly and very firmly.*) You can show 'em your opinion by saying to the people of Stoke-on-Trent – We are prepared; and to the BSC – we are prepared; and you can show it to Ted Heath and them lads down there – we are prepared. And most of all you can show it to yourself and your family and your children that we are prepared to fight for Shelton Bar.

Ted sits. The men applaud with sincere enthusiasm. Frank gets up.

FRANK: You've heard Ted say what he's got to say – I think he's put a damn good case forward, are we go it alone as far as the mill or do we want to back Shelton as a whole to keep it as a small community which to me is sound policy?

ONE OF THE MEN: Wouldn't it have bin a better idea before sending the brochure out, to have a delegates meeting – because I haven't seen that brochure.

TED: The BSC 'ad eight months to produce their brochure we 'ad two days to produce ours, because it'd gotta be ready for next week. The strategy. We're playing 'em at their own game.

HERBERT (*getting up*): But why weren't we told about this Ted?

TED: Well, there were 70 delegates attended that meeting. The vote in principle was taken.

HERBERT: We knew nothing about this 'til er last night.

TED: Well er communications, communications, that's what it is.

HERBERT: Oh.

TED: Its bin produced in rapid quick time, for next Tuesday's meeting.

HERBERT: I'll give you that point Ted,

but couldn't it have got around a bit more quickly. I know you haven't got much time . . .

There is a pause.

TED: But yer happier now.

HERBERT: I'm 'appier now, now I've heard the full context of it. (*He sits down.*)

Dennis Storer gets up.

DENNIS: I think we ought to show Ted by a hearty round of applause that we appreciate the fact that he's come to put everything before us.

The men applaud. During the end of this the girls have come on, ready to accompany the song.

Song – Fight for Shelton Bar

Two men sing to banjo and guitar accompaniment. The rest of the men sing the chorus. The girls add a harmony to the choruses – a kind of wordless drone, increasing in volume with each one.

TWO MEN (*sing*):

We've been making iron at Shelton Bar since 1839,

And through the years of war and strife, we've stood the test of time,

But now they want to turn us out and throw us with the scrap,

They must be bloody barmy if they think we'll stand for that!

ALL (*sing*):

We're Shelton men, we're not afraid,

we've got our dignity,

We'll fight and win the battle, boys,

against the BSC,

They may be strong and powerful but

that won't get them far,

For we are all united now to fight for

Shelton Bar!

TWO MEN (*sing*):

The Sinter and Blastfurnace men are

with us, every one

They've joined the fight, although for

them there's nothing to be won,

Electric arcs don't need them, but they're

proud and spirited men, They'll give all they've got and more, and won't surrender even then!

ALL (*sing*):

We're Shelton men, we're not afraid,

we've got our dignity,

We'll fight and win the battle, boys,

against the BSC,

They may be strong and powerful but

that won't get them far,

For we are all united now to fight for

Shelton Bar!

TWO MEN (*sing*):

We know we make a profit, and we

know our steel's the best,

Men with money brains and business

sense are ready to invest,

We get our orders out on time, we never

get complaints,

We're too bloody good to be alive, they

ought to make us Saints!

ALL (*sing*):

We're Shelton men, we're not afraid,

we've got our dignity,

We'll fight and win the battle, boys,

against the BSC,

They may be strong and powerful but

that won't get them far,

For we are all united now to fight for

Shelton Bar!

TWO MEN (*sing*):

And now they want to close us with their

10 year strategy,

They don't care about the man who has

to face his family,

The Kaido and the Concast men will

fight it, tooth and nail,

To save their jobs and keep their pride –

we know they'll never fail!

ALL (*sing*):

We're Shelton men, we're not afraid,

we've got our dignity,

We'll fight and win the battle, boys,

against the BSC,

They may be strong and powerful but

that won't get them far,

For we are all united now to fight for

Shelton Bar!

TWO MEN (*sing*):

They want to keep our Demag Mill, the

finest in the land,

And put the rest in mothballs, just to

keep it near at hand, But we have got another plan, I'm sure you will agree, Put the BSC in mothballs, and then Shelton will be free!

ALL (*sing*):

We're Shelton men, we're not afraid,

we've got our dignity,

We'll fight and win the battle, boys,

against the BSC,

They may be strong and powerful but

that won't get them far,

For we are all united now to fight for

Shelton Bar!

The lights change gradually to flood the stage with a bluish light. During the next section, the Action Committee and Audrey assemble with their papers and with a box containing the present for Dr Finniston. Everyone is in his best suit. The tables and chairs are set out in two confronting rows.

Meeting with Dr Finniston

All the following speeches come from the overhead loudspeakers as everyone assembles. From time to time everyone listens as they organise. First it is Tony Inchley, BBC Radio Stoke-on-Trent's News Editor.

INCHLEY (*recorded*): Fight for

Shelton Bar written by Polly Warren

of the Victoria Theatre. It's been

released today in a neat sense of timing

on the eve of the crucial visit by Dr

Monty Finniston, Chairman of the

British Steel Corporation. This after-

noon Mr Ted Smith, the Chairman of

the Action Committee, said he was

now optimistic, optimistic that Dr

Finniston would at least announce the

deferment of closure, coupled with

investment in the rolling mill. And his

confidence was shared by the Action

Committee Secretary, Bill Foster.

On the stage the others look at Bill as they listen.

BILL (*recorded*): Well, they chose the ground to play on, and they are supplying their team tomorrow, and,

how I look at it, if you're losing four-none, and there's two minutes to go, there ain't much chance of winning the game, and the BSC at the moment are losing four-none. Every eventuality is called for in the brochure, except one, and that's the facts. We've provided the facts. The fiction is in the BSC brochure, the facts are in the Shelton Works Action Committee Brochure. It is now the morning of 27 November 1973 in Shelton Works Canteen. Dr Finniston comes in with Herbert Morley and another BSC executive. From the loudspeaker comes the recording of the actual event. First there are some indistinct introductions as the BSC Chairman is greeted by Ted Smith and goes along the row of Action Committee members shaking hands. Then the BSC party stand aside as Ted comes forward to make his presentation.

TED (*recorded*): I would like now to welcome you on be alf of two thousand seven indted of your loyal workers, at Shelton. In doing so, I would like you to accept a Royal Doulton figure depicting St. George an' Drag, the Dragon on their be alf. Dr Finniston. (*Ted makes the presentation, shaking hands with the Chairman, who looks admiringly at the Royal Doulton figure as the recording proceeds.*)

DR FINNISTON (*recorded*): Well thank you very much indeed. Well, Mr Smith an, er, gentlemen. I can't speak to all two thousand seven hundred of you, but perhaps you'll tell them how er, pleased I am to accept this magnificent gift on behalf of the Corporation. Er, it's a another example of the skill which is shown by the people resident in this area. Ahhh, I think it will grace the Corporation's Board for a long time to come. Er, – (*Dr Finniston now moves across to his place at the conference table, with his party, looking across at the Action Committee members.*) I've er, I've just got one thing to give you in return, er, following upon the management er, er, er proposal to us, the Board of the Corporation has decided to er, install

Part Two

KALDO SEQUENCE

There is at first general lighting all over the stage – four of the Action Committee come on and indicate as they speak the geography of the steel plant. A loud harsh hooter sounds.

PETER: Everything this side of the canal –

FOSTER: Is the North Works.

STAN: The North Works.

BILL FOSTER: This is the steel plant. Over there is the mill, sort of way behind it.

PETER: See the iron where we just seen it made comes down and comes into this buildin' ere.

Another warning hooter sounds twice as the men start to go off. The lights change. Two steel plant workers in red helmets with visors come on and start to put on their protective gloves and get ready to take a sample. They keep their backs to the intense light from a Kaldo vessel at one end. Otherwise it is gloomy now. There is a great row from the vessels, and the two workmen shout.

FIRST MAN: The iron'll be picked up and poured into these vessels.

SECOND MAN: Kaldo convertors – Swedish.

FIRST MAN: Then it's turned the other way, scrap and all additions put it. Back 'ere, blow oxygen on it, spin it round, mix it all up, melt it all down . . . slag, the slag'll go out that way, pour the other way, the steel goes out to the casting plant.

The second man walks in a semi-circle slowly round in front of the Kaldo vessel, looking into the light, shielding his face from the heat, to inspect the lining. The recorded commentary from a steel plant Foreman comes over the speakers.

FOREMAN'S VOICE: What we do with the iron in the Kaldo is to use oxygen to burn away the carbon, the silicon,

the phosphorus, and to get rid of the sulphur as well.

The second man pauses in his inspection.

SECOND MAN: Technically speaking that is incorrect, but it's the best way of putting it.

He now does the same operation in the other direction, still in a semi-circle round the front.

FOREMAN'S VOICE: We blow oxygen into the vessel which lies at an angle of about 70 degrees and is rotated to agitate the bath. In this way the oxygen reacts more readily with the constituents.

Two blasts of the warning hooter sound.

TANNOY ANNOUNCEMENT: Kaldo Two tilting, stand clear! Stand clear! Kaldo Two tilting.

The background sound now reduces a little, the men on stage go off, the lights change to reveal three Action Committee members on the stairs in the auditorium, and two of their wives.

Shangri-la

PHIL ROGERS: By reducing the work-force on Shelton Bar, they're gonna take a livin' from out of my children's mouths, and they're goin' to wander in time to come, so I'm goin' t'be a split family with probably a son in Glasgow, one in London and one in Bristol looking for male work.

STAN: This is our home town, our area, and this is where we want jobs, and where we intend to have them.

PHIL R.: The majority of the people of Stoke-on-Trent are local and they stick. You don't find many communities of Stoke-on-Trent people anywhere else in the country, but only Stoke-on-Trent. We're like together, we don't move.

STAN (speaking Dave Matthias' lines): What he's trying to say, that Stoke-on-Trent to us is our Shangri-la. Stoke-on-Trent is our Shangri-la.

MYRA: The day that man on the television, Lord Melchett, said that Shelton Iron and Steel were going to close A sat down and cried. Then I thought what y'cryin' for? If it's going to happen, it's going to happen.

TOM TIMMIS: You plan, and all of a sudden somebody at a little desk in a bloody office comes round an gets a red pencil and says – you've finished.

MRS WHALLEY: Wasn't it Prince Philip who said – pull your socks up – when people pull their socks up what do they get for their reward?

PHIL R.: None of us are salesmen, none of us want to go on a milk-cart, you know, men do 'ave a little bit of pride.

TOM TIM: This is what we're fighting for – dignity and pride. I've worked all my life and I feel – I think anyway as I've got dignity, I've got me pride, and if I have to go cap in hand to Social Security, and bow to these people, I know very well that I wouldn't be able to lift my head up nowhere – at the moment I can do.

Another blast on the hooter, the lights and sound change back to the Kaldo bay, the two men trundle on a metal screen and a long spoon ready to take a sample.

Sampling

FOREMAN'S VOICE (over the speaker): Right. When the, the charge is er come to its end in the respect that we've achieved the temperature that we require er this is er achieved by the amount of oxygen that we blow, and when this amount has been blown we slow the rotation down to make the slag into a consistency such that we can penetrate it by a sample spoon, to obtain a sample of the steel in the bath. We check the temperature. (As the recorded description goes on, the men take the sample, wheeling the screen in front of the Kaldo vessel, pushing the long spoon through a slot in it into the molten steel, taking it out

with great care, one man supporting it with a steel hook by the bowl while the other pours it into a mould.) If this temperature is satisfactory, normally round 1650 degrees centigrade, we take a sample of the steel bath by pushin the sample spoon through the slag, it coats the spoon with a, er, a layer of slag, a spoonful of steel is pulled out of the bath 'n poured into a copper mould.

FIRST MAN: This sample now goes to the laboratories, behind the offices. They analyse it with an electronic analyser.

The two men carry off the mould and wheel off the screen and the spoon and hook. The warning sounds. The lights change to show Bill, Ted and Albert on the auditorium stairs with the blue BSC documents in their hands. Romy speaks for the Vic Research Committee, as it were.

The Brochure Arrives

ALBERT: All steelworks with notice of closure, are presented with a brochure giving the economic reasons why it's closing.

BILL: The economic argument for closing Shelton. It isn't enough to say – you're uneconomic, we think you ought to go, to close our works, they've got to prove it to us, y'see.

SECOND ACTRESS: Four copies of the BSC brochure were handed to the Shelton Action Committee at noon on Wednesday 14th November.

TED: Initially, on hearing of the Shelton brochure, and its publication, I awaited breathlessly for it to be delivered. I was expecting a document four foot thick to tell us why we'd got the sack, but they do it in eight pages.

BILL: The hilarity with which we've greeted it has meant that we've been delayed in getting through it. It's not a long document, but it is funny.

ALBERT: It really is amazingly naive. Perhaps they feel that we're too thick



good policy. But can we do it for our end, day in day out, week in, week in, year in, year in. This is what it means, you've got to get some strategy. Have you means to stop those blooms coming to the furnace. That seems the only thing that's reasonable to me.

Several delegates get up at once and speak noisily protesting and supporting Frank's worries. Bill talks them down.

BILL: What we're talking about actually, is the fact that we're very near to a possibility of a crunch situation when people have got to stand up and be counted.

SOMEONE: Hear! Hear!

TED (*rises to get order*): Just one speaker, lads. (*He sits.*)

Another pause. Men consult each other animatedly, while the instrumental plays through. Then Bill rises.

BILL: But all we're asking at this meeting and we've done this once before . . .

DELEGATE: Yeah, that's true.

BILL: Have you made your own minds up as to where you stand, so that we know as a body in this room we're all going out preaching the same gospel. Or has anybody got any doubts, because anybody that's sitting in here now that's got any doubts, that door's not locked. And they might as well go through it. (*Bill points to the door.*)

Dennis rises from the body of the meeting.

DENNIS: Well, can I speak as a mill delegate, Mr Chairman? I've never believed for one second that the mill could roll in isolation to the rest of the steel plant on this, at Shelton. I have never believed it and I never will, so if you want a second to the proposal from the mill, then I'll second it by all means.

TED (*rises*): I'd like to now put that proposition to the meeting. Proposed by Tom Playford that we use the mill as an argument against the Steel Corporation. It has been duly seconded. I

PART TWO 29
put it to the meeting, all those in favour of that proposition?

All except Frank raise their hands. Anyone against? (No-one signifies.) Passed unanimously.

All sing a final chorus as the chairs and tables are moved aside and the standing rails and angles are brought in to build the guard around the Concast machine.

ALL (*sing*):
Thank you kindly Mr Melchett, we know exactly where we are
We don't think your plan is wise, and we're going to organise
So you'd better keep your hands from off the Bar.

CONCAST SEQUENCE

The lights change. The guard around the Concast machine is a framework about six feet high with sheets of corrugated iron bolted onto it. Through slots in the frame project the long handles that operate the flow of molten steel from the ladle into the tundish on top of the casting machine. A dazzling light shines through the gaps between the iron sheets. The rest of the stage is gloomy. Walter Watkins and two other mould operators with red helmets and big visors build the framework. There is a low continuous roaring sound from gas burners heating new tundishes and empty ladles.

WALT: We're on top of the casting flow, 70 feet above ground level.

SECOND OPERATOR: The Concast machine. (*He points to it.*)

Sound of the overhead crane comes in.

WALT: The crane – (*He points upwards.*) – lifts that ladle full of molten steel up that shaft and drops it onto this casting machine.

SECOND OPERATOR: There's a man up there, he controls the flow of metal

of the ladle.

WALT: The steel runs through into a tundish.

SECOND OPERATOR: Then it runs out of the tundish into these three moulds.

WALT: That man up there also controls the water flow which cools the mould. So when the steel gets to the ground floor, it's solid.

SECOND OPERATOR: We control the flow of steel out of the tundish into the moulds with three rods.

They have completed assembling the frame and rods and move into position, working the long handles.

WALT: We are making one continuous long billet, which is cut off at the bottom to the required lengths. If you like, a kind of sausage machine.

Ted has come on, looking for someone. The guitar and autoharp instrumental to the Rover's Song begins.

TED: I never relate a job to wages I don't, funny that, isn't it? Y'know, I wouldn't like to compare our wages with what they get in other industries. I would compare Shelton as a place of worship, not a place of work. Y'know, it's a place to, y'know, you look forward to going, it's not . . . There's companionship there, there's humour, there's everything.

Bill Foster has appeared momentarily, like Ted in a helmer.

BILL: They're all comedians up 'ere you know.

Rover's Song

The work carries on while the girls sing the song, sitting on the stairs and the orchestra return, with an actor joining the instrumental on a mouth-organ.

GIRLS (sing):
We know a joker, Bernard Wright,
Been welding the Power for years
Then he went to work for a stationery firm

And he soon got bored to tears.

MEN (join in the chorus):

So take me back, back on the Bar

It's the rover's constant plea

I haven't half missed you while I've been away

So it's back to the Bar for me.

The instrumental carries on.

WALT: The worst problem on here is in summer – the heat. Then you've got winter which is not too bad because you've got the cold, an' it's nice to be in front o' heat. Where in summer, you've got heat an' heat. We've had men here flake out in front of these strands. Just keel over with heat exhaustion. That's how hard it is here, but still we donna get a penny extra for it in summer. Get nothin' extra for this and it's four times harder in summer than it is in winter.

SECOND OPERATOR: That's when we start running for sweat tablets . . .

WALT: Yes, sweat tablets.

SECOND OPERATOR: Have you ever 'ad any o' them?

WALT: Put salt back into us.

SECOND OPERATOR: Y' start running for sweat tablets – y' can always tell a bloke when he's 'ad sweat tablets, can't you –

They all laugh.

GIRLS (sing):

There was Eric Burton, an army bloke

An electrical man by trade

When Swinerton's gave him redundancy pay

He just turned round and said,

ALL (sing):

Please take me back, back on the Bar

It's the rover's constant plea

I haven't half missed you while I've been away

So it's back to the Bar for me.

WALT: Um, you've got the sparks, burns er . . . you've got the problem of keepin the strand goin if the stopper end goes. Very often we get badly burned.

SECOND OPERATOR: Yea.

WALT: Oh yes. We've got men that 'av finished on here. We've got one off the shopfloor now, that's 'ad is eye er he's finished altogether. Oh we 'ave several burned.

ONE OF THE GIRLS: What can you do to avoid it?

WALT: You've got protective headwear, sometimes er it's just one o' them things, that a spark hits a bit o' cold metal 'n flirts up into y'visor an y've got it.

GIRL: Is there anything you can do to stop that – any dodges like?

WALT: No, no. Y' get protective clothing, footwear, suit, and er they use what y've got y'self.

The instrumental plays on mouth-organ only, as three girls step forward in their own spotlight, as wives of the men.

MYRA: I asked him what they like about Shelton, he comes home, he's filthy, he's dirty, his shoes are melin, he's workin in horrible conditions.

SHIRLEY: Do you get that horrible brown the red

MYRA: Mmm – yes oh horrible it is, and he comes in, as you get near . . . you just have to brush past 'im, you're covered.

MYRA: Sometimes, I feel, surely there's a better job than this. Something better for 'im and we could have a much better life.

SHIRLEY: There's bin quite a lot that we know that would love to get back.

MYRA: There's one young apprentice. His uncle offered him a job and it'd got all the good prospects so he let, and he'd come back on his knees tomorrow to join 'em at Shelton – so it can't be as bad as it p' raps sounds, y'know.

GIRLS (sing):
Geoff Brooks went away for a year or more
To work for the Michelin men.
But he tired of the tyres and he came

right back
To the steelworks once again.

ALL (sing):

So take me back, back on the Bar,

It's the rover's constant plea,

I haven't half missed you while I've been away

So it's back to the Bar for me.

The mould operators finish the cast, the sound of the crane comes in as the ladle is removed, they dismantle the guard and take the pieces away.

WALT: You could come up to me now an say – I could do with a drink o' water, can y' get us one? – You can't find a drink o' water on this shop floor of a modern steelworks. (He erupts with irritation.) I'll tell you where it is an y' can go an 'ave a look at it – an tell me if it's adequate. See them offices down there? Behind them, an everybody bloody washes in it – sink what men 'av got to drink out of.

GIRLS (sing):

There's an electrician in the mill

And Rasbridge is his name,

Two years he spent in the building trade
But he came back just the same.

ALL (sing):

So take me back, back on the Bar

It's the rover's constant plea

I haven't half missed you while I've been away

So it's back to the Bar for me.

The instrumental carries on very quietly as Mrs Cooper steps forward.

MRS COOPER: To me it's always been the be all and end all of everything, y'know, Shelton Bar's bought my house, Shelton Bar's bought the furniture, Shelton Bar has given me everything that I've got, I mean, everything I've got I owe to Shelton Bar. When you've worked at the Bar for as long as my family's been there, you sort of, oh I don't know – it's difficult to explain . . . I feel as if it's home, Shelton Bar's home.

GIRLS (sing):
If Shelton Bar was taken apart
And the bits were carted away

Wherever you went all over the world
You'd hear those pieces say

ALL (*sing*):

Oh take me back, back on the Bar
It's the rover's constant plea
I haven't half missed you while I've been
away

So it's back to the Bar for me.

The instrumental carries on.

TED: And er, y'know, I say to meself,
well, y'know, my father gave his life
for industry. What did he get out of it?
He handed his history and his heritage
down to me, that he'd fought and
worked for. He'd bin crushed and
maimed and buried y'know, in a pit
... y'see, I've got mental pictures of
these things and nothing could ever
detract from what I'm fighting for,
y'know. I've got a mental picture apart
from me father, people on Shelton
Bar, I've seen 'em with limbs torn off,
heads crushed in, and they're mar-
vellous men, and if they had their time
all over again they'd do exactly the
same these men would.

*As the last verse and chorus of the
Rover's Song is sung, half a dozen
members of the Action Committee's
Sub-committee come on and set up a
long table for a conference.*

GIRLS (*sing*):

If Shelton Bar were taken apart
And the bits were carted away,
Wherever you went, all over the world
You'd hear those pieces say

ALL (*sing*):

Oh take me back, back on the Bar
It's the rover's constant plea
I haven't half missed you while I've been
away
So it's back to the Bar for me.

THE ACTION COMMITTEE BROCHURE

As the men, with the Action Committee

*Minutes Secretary, Audrey, get ready with
their papers, Polly steps forward, as her-
self – we were present at most of these
meetings.*

FIRST ACTRESS: We started recording
on Shelton Bar in the last week of
October. Lord Melchett had died
suddenly in the summer. Roy Pepper a
Mill Foreman on the Action Com-
mittee had spoken to the new Char-
man Dr Monny Finniston, at the TUC
Conference. He had agreed to visit
Shelton. On Tuesday 20 November,
the Action Sub-committee met to com-
plete their reply to the BSC brochure
before Dr Finniston's visit in seven
days' time.

*The men are sitting in shirt-sleeves. The
table is strewn with paper. Audrey is
listening to the discussion, but at the
same time sorting through the contents
of the Action Committee's brochure,
ready for typing it.*

BILL: The point being that they haven't
got a port at Scunthorpe.

TED: They're eighteen miles from their
nearest port and this er, strategy of
theirs was based on deep-water port
facilities.

PETER: Do the BSC know of our port
facilities round here: Longport,
Middleport, Westport Lake, Port
Vale?

BILL: Unfortunately for the BSC,
they've produced more than one
brochure, and one has been delivered
to East Moors, and discussed with
East Moors, and on that table for East
Moors, the cost of new capital – You've
all got one of these (*They refer to the
xeroxed sheets*) – of the Scunthorpe
project, is defined at £11.20 per ton.
But when they come to Shelton, they
don't want to include it. We can only
draw one conclusion to this, the case
they're arguing at Shelton, will not
stand the addition of these charges.
The fact that the BSC don't want to
include it is only really saying to us,
we haven't got a very good case for
Shelton. They can't call it new capital
at East Moors with reference to

Scunthorpe, and come to Shelton and
say it's not new capital.

STAN: It also looks as though they
might be playing one works agin
another. Are yer gonna give them this
information or are we gonna bring this
in when Finniston comes down.

BILL: No, no. It's gotta go in the
brochure.

TED: We shall photostat this and submit
it as evidence, as evidence, as in a
court of law.

STAN: Aye.

TED: It's a fact, it's, it's reproduced out
of the East Moors brochure. They're
the BSC figures.

*Audrey finds a sheet she doesn't
recognise.*

AUDREY: Is this anything I don't know
about?

BILL: Yes, well, that's just an illustra-
tion really of the type of table we shall
produce.

PETER: Can you pass that round the
table, please?

BILL: And you can have a look at it.
We're going to prove in this brochure
that we can produce the steel cheaper
than they can at Scunthorpe.

*First Actress steps forward again, the
instrumental to the Rover's Song is
played, the tables are re-arranged into a
round table shape and a typewriter is
brought in for Audrey.*

FIRST ACTRESS: That afternoon, in
the conference room of Etruria Hall,
Albert Cooper, Bill Foster, Ted Smith
and other members of the Action Sub-
Committee work to finish the final
draft for the printers.

*Though late November, it is a hot
sunny afternoon. Audrey types the
final draft of the brochure as each page
is cleared by long slogging arguments
between Bill Foster, Ted Smith and
Albert Cooper. Everyone is getting
tired, but there is a firm constructive
atmosphere nonetheless.*

BILL (*staring again on this topic*): Let's
then take the new capital, new invest-
ments at Scunthorpe, BSC's figures,
not ours.

ALBERT (*who is playing a kind of
devil's advocate role, as the last check
on figures*): Yes.

BILL: They say at Scunthorpe it's £11.20
per tonne.

ALBERT: Yes.

BILL: They do say at Shelton, it's £3.84
per tonne.

ALBERT: New capital, yes.

BILL: New capital. They define it as
new capital on East Moors brochure
and all we've done is put it alongside
the new capital they say they require
at Shelton.

ALBERT: That's right.

BILL: We're comparing like and like.
(*He goes over to Audrey.*) How are
y' doing?

AUDREY: Well, I've got to eleven, but
I want Albert's statement.

BILL (*looking in his papers*): Eleven –
Albert's statement (*To Ted and
Albert.*) Are we satisfied?

ALBERT (*dubiously*): Yeah.

TED: I'm satisfied. Sticking £3.84,
£11.20.

AUDREY: Have you got a statement
after number eleven, Albert?

ALBERT: Yes, yes. (*He passes it to
her.*)

AUDREY: Ah, there we are, yes, there
y'are Bill, there's that. (*Handing it to
Bill, who ignores it.*)

BILL (*to Albert again*): Would you
accept that it says on East Moors
brochure what it says on ours: 'Cost of
new capital'?

ALBERT: Mm hm.

BILL: You accept that?

ALBERT: Yes, that's what I'm saying.

BILL: What's the cost of new capital on



ROSE Saturday we'd done this list. Me and Brenda arranged to go up Anley because Bridge doesn't like, shopping! She's gorra aversion to it. So we'd arranged to go - to meet on Monday morning to do the shopping. So we got a load o money out of our account, which we were oping Ilary would refund - Hilary's also Treasurer. An I went pick Brenda up. Me an Ann-Marie, me little girl, went pick Brenda up.

BREN Gorra say this lists grown by then. Cos over the weekend ave bin addin and addin and addin to it. A've added like

ROSE Toiletries

BREN Well

ROSE Body Shop stuff

BREN Haven't got any soap for av a wash with, so ave added a bar of soap. Adn't got no toilet roll. What if they've only got that paper stuff, you know, that horrible...

ROSE Oh no we couldn't av that on the bum

BREN Wanted a nice soft paper toilet roll in there. So a've added toilet roll, soap to it. Added string. An I'd said Wilkinsons is the cheapest. Cos I'm a dead conscious shopper. For save ten pence I'd walk the old of Anley, if a thought a piece of string was ten pence cheaper in one shop than the other.

ROSE So we parks up an we went into Wilkinsons and picked up a basket but we should a picked a piggin trolley up shouldn't we. And we're dead, we're like this aren't we? (ie furtive) And there's our Ann-Marie runnin up and down the bloody aisles and yer can't do anythin, and I'm shoutin Cum ere! Cum ere! Cum round ere. She's 4, Ann-Marie.

ROSE nd she's like - well she's bin with us since 6 weeks old. so she know the score. So Brenda's got the list and we were like lookin shifty like... two washin lines first - and we're like pullinit like - washin lines - and I don't know why we're actin like this. A mean we could a been gettin washin lines for washin lines, but you just know yer doin somethin naughty

BREN Yeh. We were ok on the washin lines and the plastic bags cos they were like in the first aisle anybody picks that sort o stuff up. Then we went round to the cosmetics bit and got the soap.

ROSE Got all the bits

BREN Got some toilet roll

ROSE We were going great guns!

BREN Then we turns the corner down to the

ROSE Tools!

BREN Tool department. And we'd got all this nice like cosy ousewife stuff in the basket and then suddenly we're confronted by ammers, chains

ROSE We got to get an ammer that'll knock the lock off. So am pickin it up. (whisper) Bren, what d'you think of this? Ere, feel this

BREN And am geein no the ed's too big on that Rose, it won't go in between the locks. Try another one. So we're testin all these ammers on padlocks, seeing which'll fit in between, you know.

ROSE And then we got to the Stanley knives!

BREN Yeh, yeh

ROSE We ad everythin out, you know. We ad the ole tool shelf out. Demonstratin it all. And our Ann Marie

BREN We were just shifty, lookin round, you know, thinking what's everybody thinkin!

ROSE Security like

BREN What's goin on you know?

ROSE But a said no, we're normal shoppers, we've got pretend nothing's appenin. But we were, I was feelin shifty. Was you?

BREN Yeh

ROSE I mean we were payin for it. Wasn't like we were nickin it

BREN Now we leave the chains because they don't look strong enough

ROSE No

BREN And they're only, what, 3 quid odd each

ROSE Yeh

BREN So we think, we'll leave the chains and go and see what Alfords got.

ROSE And your mate from the community centre was standin at the check out want he?

BREN The bloke that works up the community centre where I work, with me, he's in front of us in the queue. An I mean e's gettin one or two bits and pieces, and we slap this great big basket on the counter with ammers and god knows what in, and screwdrivers and Stanley knives and e's lookin and thinking

MAN What the ells goin off ere like. Looks like they're toolin up ready for do a job, you know

BREN Cos that's what it looked like. We felt like that. I felt like

ROSE Robbers

BREN Like we're doin a job. The only thing that was missin was swag bag and a black mask, yer know. We would a bin well away

ROSE We paid the money and we come out

BREN We come out with it and went ter Alfords, and looked at the chains. And they'd got chains in Alfords, very similar but they were five or six quid more. And I said no, I'm not paying that, we'll go back to Wilkinsons and ave them

ROSE Carryin two big bags up the length trying hold onto our piggin Ann Marie oo's goin mental.

BREN So we go back to Wilkinsons and what happens cos we walk back in through the alarm system with Wilkinsons bags with stuff in, the alarms go off!

ROSE The alarms go of!

BREN In Wilkinsons. And the security's comin, goin

MAN Oh ooh, what've you got

ROSE We got two bags. We've just bin in 'ere we're comin back again. You can ave a look if you want. You know like - more over the top than you should av bin like, you know. Just to take attention from yourself. So, we goes back in, and then we decided, we probably needed, as well as chains, a bit more

BREN Remember the writing pads we'd forgotten, pens an stuff

ROSE So we're goin round a second tour o Wilkinsons. Spend a load more money like, and I'm treasurer of my group an am thinkin oh christ, conner afford any more like, you know. Forkin it all out again. We gets outside Wilkinsons, walkin along, and it was like a sigh of relief right that's it, we've got everythin. And then I notice our Ann Marie walkin in front of me with this piggin washin line. She'd nicked it. But not on purpose. Just picked it up. So I said oh Brenda come on lets get out of ere quick like. So we just legged it back to the car dead quick, didn't we.

Blues Sisters
Bob a doba dob dob a doo
Blues Sisters
Bob a doba dob dob a doo
Blues Sisters

We got oxo, pasta, bog rolls and soap
Loads 'n loads a chocolate so Brenda can cope
Dried soup, dried fruit, dried milk, dried beans
Tea and coffee and tons of sardines
Sanitary towells and a mobile phone
Which they got loaned from ... (they don't need to know!)
Felt tips, torches and sleeping bags
And a five gallon water bottle ugh! What a drag!
A great big banner "Save Our Pit"
Now all we gotta do...
Is occupy it!

Appendix 6.3

We are Women, we are Strong

Chorus:

We are women we are strong
 We are fighting for our lives
 Side by side with our men
 Who work the nation's mines
 United by the struggles, united by the past
 And it's here we go here we go
 For the women of the working class

We don't need Government's approval for anything we do
 We don't need their permission to have a point of view,
 We don't need anyone to tell us what to think or say
 We've strength enough and wisdom of our own
 To go our own way

Chorus

They talk about statistics, about the price of coal
 The price is our communities dying on the dole
 In fighting for our future, we found ways to organise
 Where women's liberation failed to move
 This strike has mobilised

Chorus

Ours is a unity that threats can never breach
 Ours an education books or schools could never teach
 We faced the taunts and violence
 Of Thatcher's thugs in blue
 When you're fighting for survival you've got nothing
 Nothing left to loose

Chorus